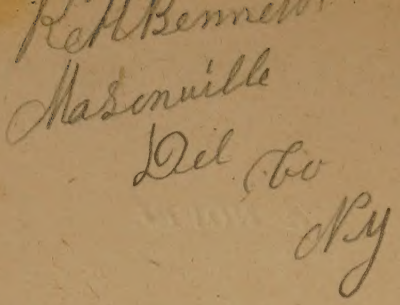
EDITION

BEYOND PARDON.

A NOVEL.

By BERTHA M. CLAY.

NEW YORK AND CHICAGO
BUTLER BROTHERS



BEYOND PARDON.

CHAPTER I

"Oh, murm'ring trees, oh, fragrant breeze;
Oh, waving, whispering limes!
Oh, there to be again with thee
My love of olden times!"

THE voice that sang the words was sweet as any voice could be; the lips from which the melody flowed were beautiful as could be seen. "My love of olden times," she repeated, and then she smiled to herself, thinking that the love of the olden, and of the present, and of all future time, even of the great day of doom and through the eternity lying beyond it, would be ever the same.

Then Elinore, Lady Rydal rose from the piano. Perhaps, taking her as she stood that moment, she was the happiest woman under the sun; yet she had sung sweet, sad words to herself until her eyes had filled with tears—the memory of the beautiful lime-trees in her old home,—the fine old home with its sea-washed walls and its wealth of "waving, whispering limes;" happy tears, for she had known nothing but happiness all her bright young life; happy tears, for the only love she had known under the limes was that of the husband she loved with all her heart, Sir Lionel Rydal.

The date on which this story opens was the twenty-seventh

of June—a warm, rich, beautiful June; there was golden, sun light, blue sky, the fair laughter of the green earth, the bloom of a thousand flowers, the song of happy birds, the murmur of trees, the white gloss of the lily, the perfume of the rose, the odor of the newly-mown hay; there was the rush of the river, and in the far distance the blue line of water—the English Channel. All these beautiful sights and sounds had come to Lady Rydal as she sat in her luxurious drawing-room at Dunwold, the fairest, sweetest lady who had ever reigned within those walls. She walked from the piano to the long French window standing wide open, so that the perfumed breeze may come in freely; it stirred the hangings of white silk; it stirred the golden hair on my lady's head and the white lace on her breast. She looks with those beautiful blue eyes of hers through the long green glades; but there is no one coming, and she is waiting with her whole soul in her eyes for some one.

She little dreams, as she smiles at the sunlight, that to-day, for her, it will set forever; as she looks now with the glad light of happiness and love in her eyes and on her beautiful face, she never looks again.

Standing by the long window, the green and golden light fell full on her, and showed one of the loveliest faces ever beheld—a face to dream about, seen on canvas, copied, and raved about, but seldom met with in real life. There was a magnificent engraving published some years since of Byron's "Maid of Athens," and Lady Rydal resembled it greatly—the same faultlessly beautiful features—the same exquisite mouth, and dreamy, lovely eyes—the same noble, beautiful line of mouth chin, and neck—a fair, gentle loveliness, at times ethereal in pensive repose, again brilliant in animation.

Not a startling beauty, all rich contrast and delicious color, such as takes a man by storm, but a queenly, dignified loveliness that gave to her the grace and the majesty of an empress. She was married at eighteen, and now, when this story opens, she is but twenty-three—twenty-three and the sword of Damocles hanging over her head. Her figure is full of girlish grace—erect and slender as a palm-tree; she is dressed in a robe of pale blue silk, trimmed with rich white lace, and in her hair, loosened by the summer wind, she wears some pale blue cornflowers—not so blue as her beautiful eyes.

On her white, slender fingers shine rich gems—her wedding-ring a band of gold—diamonds, rubies, and pearls,—hands that are like white snowdrops against the blue of her dress. A fair

picture for a man's eyes to shine upon, a fair woman for a man to protect and love, to cherish and reverence ; not at all the kind of woman to be ruthlessly slain and smitten to the earth idly as the red poppy is cut down which grows amongst the corn. She looks at the jewelled clock that rumor said had once been Madame Pompadour's; it was nearly four, the heat grew more oppressive, and the song of the birds grew faint.

"Only four o'clock," she said to herself; then she rang the bell, and a stately, gray-headed butler appeared. Henry Bennet had served two generations of the Rydals, and had grown old with them.

"Bennet," said Lady Rydal, "are you quite sure that there has been no message, no telegrams from Sir Lionel?"

"I am quite sure, my lady," he replied; "since I have seen that your ladyship was anxious I have not left the hall."

She looked at him wistfully, and the old man's face grew paler.

"Do you think," she asked, "it is possible that any such message or telegram could come without your knowing, or that it may have been laid aside?"

"No such thing is possible at Dunwold, my lady; permit me to say that the household is too well-organized for that."

At another time Lady Rydal would have smiled, but now there was a quick uneasy sense of pain and dread—she knew not of what.

"I cannot understand it," said her ladyship, plaintively. "It seems very extraordinary, Bennet; there cannot be anything the matter that I do not know?"

The butler shook his head and answered something that sounded like "business."

"Oh, Bennet," said Lady Rydal, plaintively, "you might have suggested something else; Sir Lionel has no business that would keep him away in this fashion. Can you think of nothing else?"

"I cannot, my lady."

If he had any thought, any idea, he did not confide it to her.

"At what time was dinner ordered?" asked Lady Rydal.

"At seven, my lady," he answered.

"Just look through the time-table, Bennet, and see when the next train comes from London."

While the man obeyed her commands, Lady Rydal stood

looking over the trees, and the words of her song haunted her :

"Oh, murm'ring trees, oh, fragrant breeze;
Oh, waving, whispering limes!
Oh, there to be again with thee,
My love of olden times."

Why would memory persist in dragging her back to the beautiful old lime avenues at home, where she had walked with her handsome young lover, and earth had seemed like Paradise ?

"The next train, my lady, comes in at seven; and there is one more—the last—which reaches Langholme at ten."

"Let dinner be served at eight, Bennet," said Lady Rydal, "for Sir Lionel is sure to return at seven. In the meantime order tea for me."

Ah, reader! do you know the blank, almost terrible calm that comes just before a storm; when the wind sleeps that it may gather force; when the waves lie silent that they may dash and foam; when the color and the weight of lead falls over the sky, and the earth grows frightened. That calm, that repose, came to her now. Many wives in her place would not have been at all anxious, for nothing unusual had happened? nothing but what was of a most commonplace kind.

The day on which this story opens was the twenty-seventh day of June; on the day previous Sir Lionel and Lady Rydal were taking breakfast together when the post-bag arrived; Lady Rydal opened it and took out the letters,—there were several for herself, and she was so busy in discussing then, she hardly remarked those intended for her husband.

"Lady Treherne has written; she intends coming, Lionel; I am pleased—and Miss Bell, I knew she would be certain—this is from Lady Selwyn; she will bring her daughters, I hope. We shall have a large party; I do not think there will be one refusal."

Invitations had been sent out for a party of guests.

She made running comments on all the letters that passed though her white, jewelled fingers.

"There are several for you, Lionel,"—she paused for a moment and looked at one in particular. "What curious writing" she said.

It was a thick, white envelope, which had about it the faintest possible odor of violets; the writing was hurried, agitated as though the writer was under the stress of great emotion.

She gave it to him, little dreaming that she had better far have given him a sword in his heart, a dagger in his breast.

"This is a lady's writing, Lionel," she said; "the London post-mark! Who is it from?"

How little she dreamed that she had given to him the death warrant of three lives. He looked carelessly at the envelope, but in one moment all his carelessness die away. If she had not been so entirely engrossed in her letters she must have seen that his face first flushed crimson, then grew deadly pale.

"Who is it from?" repeated Lady Rydal.

"No one whom you know," he answered, after a few minutes' pause; then he added, quickly, "I shall have to run up to town this morning; I have some business that must not be delayed; I shall return before evening."

"What business is it?" she asked, and Sir Lionel laughed, a very uneasy, confused laugh.

"Nothing you would understand, darling," he replied. "I must go at once, then I can return in the evening."

She went to him with wistful eyes and outstretched hands.

"*Must* you go, Lionel?" she said, her white arms round his neck;—and but, of course, it was her fancy—it seemed to her that he shrank for the first time from the clasp of those loving arms.

"I shall not be long," he said. "Some one I have to see on business. I shall reach home again in the evening. It is only two hours' journey, darling."

She was the most noble and the least suspicious of women, she never gave another thought to the letter or writer. Her whole soul, the very light of her life, was centred in him; he was going away for a few hours, and she thought of nothing else, she helped him with her own loving hands to make the few preparations for his journey.

"I need not take my portmanteau," he said. "I shall be back by the five or seven train."

He was not quite himself, his hand trembled. and his bright debonair face was pale and anxious. If she had seen it, she must have been struck with the curious glance that from time to time he gave her—half of regret, half of wonder. Then when the final preparations were made she went with him to the gates of the park, where the groom stood with the horses, and under the shadow of a giant oak she stopped to say good-by to him. In the bodice of her pale blue morning-dress she wore a beautiful rose one of the kind called "Maiden's Blush."

She took it from her breast, and put it in his coat, he kissed her white fingers as she did so.

"Now," she said, "every little wave of perfume which comes from the rose leaves will be a whisper of love from me."

He shrank from the loving words, yet the next minute he threw his arms round her, kissed her beautiful face with passionate kisses, and was gone.

Until the day of her death she well remembered his face as she saw it last by the light of the June sun under the shade of the great oak. He had been gone only for a few hours, still a strange chill fell over her, and the warmth had gone from the sun. At five in the evening a telegram came from Sir Lionel to say that he was unable to return that day, but she would be sure to hear of him on the morrow.

This was the morrow, and up to the present time it had brought no news from or of him.

CHAPTER II.

Lady Rydal drank the tea brought to her, and by that time it was five o clock. Even if Sir Lionel came by the seven train, she had two hours to wait. As a rule she was full of resource; she had been alone often enough, but had never felt the hours leaden and heavy and full of fancies as these. She was accomplished beyond the ordinary run of women; she spoke French, Italian and German; she was a magnificent musician; was well read; an excellent artist. Yet nothing in art or science, no beauty of art or nature could have pleased her this evening; she left her music, she pushed aside the books; the very sunlight and flowers tired her; a passionate longing to see her husband took possession of her.

"I am more restless than the Lady of Shalott," she said to herself. "'I have left the web and left the loom; the only difference is that no curse will come on me. Lionel was away for six weeks, and they did not seem so long as these two days have been. He must come or send to-night."

She had no heart and no thought away from him, and the hours were indeed leaden and long which parted them. Her face brightened with a sudden happiness—she would go to the children, those two beautiful little creatures who filled up the sum of her earthly happiness.

She went with happy, hurried steps up the broad staircase, one of the beauties of Dunwold, through the broad corridors filled with pictures, flowers and statues, until she came to the lofty, airy, bright rooms now used as nurseries.

There was the little heir of Dunwold—a sturdy, beautiful boy, with magnificent limbs and a glorious face, so like Sir Lionel's own, that she catches him to her heart with a sob that is yet a smile. He has Sir Lionel's broad, white brow and open, laughing eyes; the very glance of those frank eyes went to her heart and stirred the deep love in it to its very depths. To please his beautiful mother, Sir Lionel has called the child Gordon, after her father. She called him now.

"Gordon," she said, "come to mamma."

He sprang to her. He was certainly one of the finest, healthiest, pinkest, most magnificent little fellows! He clasped a pair of loving arms round her neck, and looked at her with his father's eyes.

"Kiss me, Gordon," she said, adding with unconscious pathos: "Mamma is troubled to-day darling."

He kissed her with lips like his father's and caressed her face with his little hands. How she loved him and his father. She loved the boy for his own sake and his father's too.

He had reached a child's prettiest age; he was nearly four years old, talked charmingly, and was a princely-child. Spoiled for his beautiful face and winning manner, still the little heir of Dunwold was a brave gallant little fellow, and, like all brave boys or brave men, tender of heart.

Then Lady Rydal went to the pretty bassinette where the youngest and loveliest child of her heart lay sleeping—the little Victoria, always called Blossom from her fairy-like loveliness. Two such perfectly beautiful children were seldom seen. She kissed the pretty pink arms, the tiny golden curls, the little blossom-like face. How she loved his children, because they were his.

"You are not looking well to-day, my lady," said the nurse Mrs. Rogers.

"No—I am troubled," said Lady Rydal with that gracious frankness which made her adored by all her inferiors.

"I hope there is nothing to seriously trouble your ladyship," said the nurse, who had a passionate love for her beautiful young mistress and her children.

Lady Rydal looked at her with a frank smile.

"You have loved and lost a husband, Mrs. Rogers, so you will understand I am anxious about Sir Lionel. He went away

yesterday, and should have returned the same evening, but sent a telegram to say that I should hear from him to-day, yet I have not heard."

"No news is good news," said the nurse; and the little heir of Dunwold, watching the spirit rather than the letter of the conversation, added. "Papa *is* coming home," at which Lady Rydal smiled, and the nurse cried, "Heaven bless the dear child, he knows everything."

"Gentlemen are so different to ladies," she continued "Now, if you, my lady, went from home, you would count every hour of your absence; you would not rest until you returned. With them it is quite different; they are like birds let loose from their cages."

"Oh nurse!" cried Lady Rydal, "do not say that. Say rather like birds loose from their nests; there is such a difference between nests and cages."

But nurse shook her head with a good-humored smile.

"Home is often a nest for ladies, but a cage for gentlemen," she said. "Not that it is so here."

Lady Rydal laughed, and then for a short time forgot her anxiety in a game at romps with her beautiful boy. There is no picture on earth so fair as that of a beautiful mother playing with a lovely child.

Then came her ladyship's maid to see if her mistress was ready to dress, and Lady Rydal was delighted to find that in the nursery time had fled—it was nearly seven.

"Has the carriage gone to the station?" was her first question, and the answer was, "Yes!" but it returned without the master, empty, and there was neither message nor messenger by that train.

"Proof conclusive," she said to her troubled heart, "that he will come by the next."

She would not be frightened, she had nothing to fear, he would come by the last train; if he had not intended to do so, he would most certainly have sent a messenger by this.

No need for her to tremble and shiver; how people would laugh at her to know that she was losing her strength, making herself ill, losing the color from her face, and the light from her eyes, all because her husband had delayed a few hours his journey home.

"He will be here at nine," she said. She was dressed for dinner in her prettiest costume—pale blue velvet and white pearls—artistic, picturesque, and beautiful, with pearls and white roses in her golden hair, but when the dinner-bell rang

she sent word that she would not dine—she would wait until Sir Lionel came, and take supper with him. And in some vague way, it was impossible to explain how, there was a weird sound about those words.

"Until Sir Lionel comes!" That struck even the servants, who repeated them.

He would come by the last train, there was no fear, and she would employ herself until he did come. She made a half promise to herself that she would never be left quite alone again. Two days more and Dunwold would be filled with laughing guests. In the meantime she was suffering a horror of nervousness. It was eight o'clock now, and the children were fast asleep; the warm, bright glory of the June day was fading into the sweeter, paler beauties of night, the song of the birds had grown faint and drowsy, the musical sounds of night—the soft falling of leaves, the deeper rush of the river, the cry of a bird startled from its sleep—all told how the hours were passing.

She would occupy herself during the next hour by making little preparations for him. She went to the dining-room to see if everything there was comfortable for him—to see if his favorite "cup" was prepared. Nothing could look more comfortable—the beautiful room, with its lofty proportions, its painted ceiling, its fine, superb paintings—the massive sideboard with its grand display of plate—the table with its elegant appointments, its dainty linen and fragrant flowers—everything was ready for him; the windows were open, and the fragrance of the roses filled the room. There was his empty chair—it did not seem long since he filled it and sat at the head of that brilliant table. The room seemed terribly empty now, although the evening sunshine filled it, and the odor of the roses perfumed it. The bright, warm, living presence was wanting, without which there was no light or fragrance for her.

She went to his dressing-room, where the sunbeams touched the pictures with gold. A portrait of her hung opposite to the window. He had told her laughingly that he must have her face near him. The sun shone on the crystal and golden ornaments of the toilet-table; everything was ready for him.

"It never grows dark in June," she thought to herself, as she watched the gorgeous hues of the setting sun, and in her heart there was a sense of relief that it was not dark; so much the better for him.

So she wandered through the brilliant and beautiful rooms

—restless, fighting with the fancies that crowded round her—until she heard the sound of carriage-wheels. Her heart gave one great bound.

He was here. All her fears and anxieties ended on the the spot. She could not wait until he came. She must clasp her arms around his neck and kiss his face. She went with flying feet through the great hall—she opened with her own white slender hand the heavy door; she went out into the beautiful rose-scented silence; she was right, it was the carriage—she went down the great, white marble steps, where the vases, filled with crimson flowers, stood, into the lime avenue. He would be surprised to find her there in the dying light of the sun, but he would comfort her with sweet words and sweetest kisses.

The coachman pulled up the horses abruptly, startled by the beautiful, anxious face, and the figure in its trailing dress of pale blue velvet. She held up one white hand as though to bid him stop, and there was a moment of suspense, during which he looked at the lady and she at him.

But no one sprang impatiently from the carriage—no glad voice cried out in surprise; but the groom, who had gone over with the carriage, came slowly down from his seat, and touched his hat to her.

"Sir Lionel has not come, my lady," he said.

She stood quite still under the shock; for one half moment her whole body quivering with pain, then she was as still and white as a marble statue, a great fear dilating her eyes. The men looked curiously at her.

"There is no other train, my lady," said the coachman; "but if I can drive auywhere——"

"No," she said. "Is there no message, no telegram?"

"Nothing my lady," answered the groom.

"You have not heard of any accident—anything on the line?"

"No, the train was all right, my lady."

He was not come; there was no news from him; there was nothing more to be done. It was useless to keep carriage and horses waiting there. They never forgot the figure, with the long trailing blue dress, standing by the white marble staircase,—the beautiful face so pale,—the white, gemmed hands clasped as though in terror.

"You can put the horses up," she said, "they will not be wanted again to-night."

Slowly enough the horses were driven to the stables, slowly

the carriage was put away; the servants murmured to each other that Sir Lionel had not returned; and my lady glided through the rose-scented silence, through the lime avenue, where the golden shafts of light were fast fading, back to the terrace on which the dark shadow of a coming tragedy lay.

CHAPTER III.

It was morning again—the whole burst of golden sunlight, of singing birds, of blooming flowers, of pearly dewdrops;—morning over the rushing, brimming river—morning over the distant, shining trees—morning so bright, so glorious, with its beauty of perfume and song, that it brought hope to many hearts wearied with pain, faint with suffering and sorrow.

The thin lines of blue smoke began to curl through the trees, the haymakers were out in the fields, the pretty dappled cows were waiting down by the pools to be milked, the whole beautiful country life was in full activity; but there was one to whom neither shine of sun, song of birds, rush of river, whisper of sweet, fragrant wind, nor odor of sweet roses brought one gleam of hope.

All night the beautiful young mistress of Dunwold had wandered through the silent rooms where the faint light never died, and where his presence seemed yet to linger. She had taken off the royal blue velvet and pearls; she wore a long blue dressing-gown, profusely trimmed with white lace; her hair, loosened from all restraint, fell like a veil of gold over her shoulders. In vain the nurse and her maid, Rosa Clamp, who was a great favorite with Lady Rydal, urged her to go to rest.

"If you would but lie down, my lady," said Rosa, "and close your eyes you would fall asleep, and morning would soon be here. Morning must bring some news."

"If you would but believe, my lady, how easily these things happen," said the nurse. "For a letter to be delayed in posting—for a gentleman to lose a train—are the most common things in the world."

Even Bennet, the butler, had made his way under some pretext to her, and said—,

"I would not be anxious my lady. If there was any accident—anything the matter—you must have heard. You will

find, my lady, some trivial, unforeseen circumstance, hardly worth noticing, has occasioned the delay."

She thanked them, the three faithful servants, who were devoted to her forever afterwards; she tried to smile as she said she should want nothing more, they could leave her; but her heart was smitten in its anguish and desolation. It was a relief when they had gone and she could wander through the silent house at her will. The full, white glory of the June moonlight lay outside, great silver shafts of light lay over the floors, mysterious shadows filled the soft gloom. She carried a wax taper—the fitful light of which made her dazzling beauty even more fair—to his study, where she could kiss the last things his hands had touched; to his room, where she could kiss the pillows on which his head had rested; to the dressing-room, where so many signs of his presence were to be seen. and then the same weary round again. She caught sight of herself once in one of the tall mirrors, and was terrified at her white face and white lips.

"Where was he?" she cried in her heart, the whole night long. What was he doing?—what kept him from her?—what was the awful sense of horror, of coming evil that paralyzed her and made her whole soul sick with dread?—why did everything bear that strange unfamiliar aspect, as though they were seen through the maze of sorrow and death?

Yet, what had happened?—why was she wandering through the house with white face and wrung hands? Simply nothing, but that her husband had gone away suddenly, and had not returned at the time mentioned. Some wives would not only have enjoyed the holiday, but would have made the most of it. Why should she suffer?—he would be here to-morrow. But her heart forbade the hope; one morrow had come and gone without bringing him, so would the next; her faith had gone, yet she could not tell why. Every evidence of worshiping love surrounded her; there was no gift so great but that he had lavished it on her; everywhere her eyes fell there was some trace of his great and abounding love for her. There, in the state drawing-room, hung that magnificent portrait of him that was considered Millais' best work. The handsome debonair face smiled out from the canvas—the blue, frank laughing eyes, the beautiful mouth, with its somewhat sensuous lines and curves—a brave, gallant young face, yet with a latent weakness. She stood before it, taper in hand.

"Oh, love, where are you?" she cried. "Speak to me, beautiful mouth; look at me, beautiful eyes. Oh, love, my love, where are you? Why do you stay away from me?"

Was it her fancy, or the flicker of the was taper, but it seemed to her that a subtle, curious smile came over the pictured face. She hastened away. Ah! there wax the rosy light in the eastern sky; there was the first faint twitter from the downy nests—it was morning.

She did not say to herself, as queens in their prison cells have done. "This is the day on which I must die; yet, in a certain sense, it was true. This day—the dawn of which was ushered in with pomp of gold and crimson, with bloom of flowers and song of birds—was the day on which all things best and brightest in this world died to her.

From the sundown till the breakfast hour time was all blank to her; the nurse who grieved over her, but thought her foolishly nervous, brought the children to see her, in all the freshness and glory of their early bath, but the beautiful young mother had neither heart nor strength to speak; Gordon's eyes, so like his father's, wounded her heart: the saucy laugh of the baby-girl was like the stab of a sword.

"I shall feel better after breakfast, nurse," she said; "bring them to me then."

There were gleams of sunshine, sudden gusts of perfumed air, a glory of music from all the green trees round, and then she was roused by the sound of the breakfast bell.

She went down. Rosa had dressed her, and had kept her alive, as it were, by saying,—

"The post-boy will be here soon, my lady, and then you are sure to hear news."

When she had seen her young mistress in the breakfast-room, the dauntless maid went out to the butler.

"Bennet," she said, "my lady has eaten nothing since yesterday at noon; whatever happens do not let the post-bag come in until she has taken some breakfast."

"Why, young woman?" asked the old butler, sternly; "do you think there will be bad news?"

"I am sure of it," said Rosa; "there never can be anything but bad news where men are concerned."

"My good Rosa," began the butler, in stately accents; but Rosa had hastened away.

If ever a woman lived whose opinion of men was low and void, it was Rosa Clamp. Lady Rydal rang the bell and asked for the post-bag; the butler said it was rather later than

usual that morning, but he would bring it in the moment it came. He watched with careful eyes until his mistress had taken some tea, and had eaten something, then went to fetch the letter-bag.

The breakfast-room was a pretty, cheerful apartment, the long French windows which opened on to a beautiful green lawn shaded with white syringa-trees; low wooden chairs were placed amongst them, a fountain played in the midst, and tame white doves fluttered round it. The whole place was surrounded with high ivy-covered walls, and this was Lady Rydal's favorite spot.

Bennet brought in the post-bag and took it to where she was sitting under the boughs of the tall syringa-trees. She had resolved to control herself, but the old man thought her white face, her quivering lips, and trembling hands the most pitiful sight he had seen under the summer sun.

He knew that a prayer rose from her heart to her lips, and if that old man could have walked a thousand miles to have brought her husband home, he would have done so. Suddenly a smile, bright as the sunshine in Heaven, broke over her face. She took up a letter and looked at the butler.

"It is all right, Bennet," she said; "this is a letter from Sir Lionel."

The green grass under her feet was studded with white daisies and golden auriculas; all the rest of the letters fell on it —the post- bag, too, and Lady Rydal leaned back in her pretty garden chair to read the letter her husband had sent her. We all like to keep with us a pleasant picture of the thing we love as we saw it last. Take with you, reader, through the pages of this story, the picture of Lady Rydal as she received her death-blow. Remember, she is still quite young—she was married at eighteen, and is now in her twenty-third year; she has never known a sorrow; she has been a loved and petted child—a loved and petted wife; she married for love, and has the most true and passionate love for her handsome, deboaire young husband; and what is the saddest of all to remember is this, that her fate is no unusual one—that hundreds of fair wives in this century of luxury and sin have suffered the same fate.

Take the picture with you, reader, through all the pages of sin and sorrow, of shame and grief that follow,—the blue of the summer sky, the gold of the sun, the ripple of the pretty fountains, the lovely bloom of the white syringa-trees, the song of the happy birds all round her,—herself, with her beautiful

face and golden hair, the fairest spot in the picture. She stopped to kiss the seal before she broke it. Ah! sweet lips that touched the most cruel death-warrant ever written.

Then she opened it, and read:

"ELINORE.—When you read this, I shall be far away; I shall have left forever the sweetest, the dearest, the truest, the most faithful wife a man ever had,—left you wilfully, with full consciousness of the wrong I am doing to you. I know, unworthy as I am, how dearly you love me; I know that from the moment you read this, the happiness of your life is ended. I leave you,—I leave my children; my heart bleeds for you and for them, but Fate is stronger than I. You have been to me an angel amongst women; you are so still, yet I am leaving you for one who is no angel. Better that I should lay my crime bare before you thus, than that you should gather it from the pages of an newspaper. Oh, Elinore! is it I who write or the fiend that has taken possession of me? I have left you,—my children my home,—forever; I have left England forever, but not alone.

"You will hate me when you read those words; better stab your loving heart with my own hand than leave you to be tortured by others. I have left England forever, but not alone. The beautiful guilty partner of my flight is Vivian, Countess of Lynn, a name perhaps unknown to you. I met her first this season in town. I have known her eight or ten weeks, and this is the end.

"Elinore, I offer no excuse; I have none. I make no attempt to palliate my crime; it is beyond pardon. In these days, what I have done is done often enough; the sin I have sinned is common enough—so common that the law has humanely stepped in to the rescue.

"Elinore, you must forget that so base a wretch ever lived; I shall not come into your life again. Gordon—Heaven's love and blessing on the child I shall never see again—Gordon will succeed me. You will live at Dunwold until he is of age. Try to forget me, Elinore. As I write these lines to be read by your pure and loving eyes, I avow myself the most pitiful fellow, the most abject coward that ever lived. Oh, Elinore, beautiful, beloved, faithful wife, good-by, for evermore! I go out into the darkness of death; good-by!"

Those were the words that killed all that was most bright and beautiful in Elinore, Lady Rydal, as she sat beneath the white syringa-trees.

CHAPTER IV.

LADY RYDAL sat quite still, with the letter in her hands. No cry came from the white, closed lips, which looked as though they would never open again. No statue carved from stone or marble was ever more silent or motionless. The wind stirred the syringa blossoms, the birds sang around her, but she was deaf, dumb and blind under this first great stroke of mortal anguish. She held the letter tightly clenched in her hands, trying to realize that he was not dead, but had gone from her—certainly not dead. There was no white, still face, over which she could weep and mourn—there was no silent figure by which she could kneel—there was no soul in heaven to which she could raise her own. He was not dead, but he had gone from her! And that was the idea she could not grasp, that he, of his own account, voluntarily and of his own free will, had left her!

It was quite useless, her thoughts were all chaos; she could not make this one idea stand out clear and distinct; she found herself thinking of any or everything else than this. She watched a white lily half opened, she watched the birds as they flew, she watched the ripples of the wind over the grass, the stirring of the sweet syringa blossoms. She thought of the engagements she had made for the day—of several things she had promised for the children, striving all the time against a sea of horrible suffering waiting somewhere for her. There was a dim consciousness that, although she sat in the golden warmth of the sunlight, a deep dark sea of sorrow lay before her, into which she must plunge.

"I, Lionel Rydal, take thee, Elinore Gordon, to be my lawful wedded wife." The words seemed to float round her—to live in the air. It was not so very long since they were uttered, since she stood by the side of the man she loved so dearly, his handsome face looking lovingly into hers—she, the happiest, fairest bride. It was not long since he had said those words, and now he had gone from her life forever. It was utterly impossible—utterly absurd. She heard the sound of a wild laugh amongst the trees, and was startled at the sound, not knowing that it was her own. They had been married. A

thousand memories of his love and care came back to her; their hearts and souls had been one. No man had loved his wife with truer devotion. All the loving memories of five sunshiny years rushed over her; he had never allowed the wind to breathe roughly on her; he had never allowed the faintest cloud or shadow to hover round her. When she was weak, he had lifted her in his arms and carried her; when she was tired, he had soothed her like a child; if ever he had seen a tear in her eyes, he had kissed it away; how tenderly, when the winds blew cold, he had drawn her furs round her; how solicitous he was that she should have the best of everything—the daintiest wine, the freshest fruit; how constantly he tended to her and cared for her. What an atmosphere of love and happiness—what a sense of safety and protection she had always felt when with him. She had never known fear in his brave, cheery presence—a touch of his hand, the clasp of his arms, had been a shield against all terrors. When she was ill, how loving and indulgent he had been. She remembered his face when they laid the baby heir in his arms; she remembered his cry of joy when he first saw the face of his baby girl. She remembered the hours she had lain with her head pillowed on his breast, his strong arms round her, his lips caressing her, his eyes smiling on her, and she so safe—oh, Heaven!—so safe in that haven of rest, in that secure refuge—her husband's arms.

And he was gone—gone out of her life to return no more. She was never again to lay her head on his breast, or rest in the clasp of his arms—never again, through the long dark days and nights, through the long months and years—she was to know his kindness and his love no more. It was impossible—it was absurd—he was her own husband, given to her before Heaven and man—how could he have left her forever?

And again the sound of her own wild laughter amidst the trees startled her.

Over the clover, through the syringa branches, came the happy sound of children's laughter—a sound that pierced her heart as with a hot sword. They were his children; how could he leave them, his children and hers? She could hear little Gordon calling out something about "papa's roses." What nonsense she had been dreaming, and the letter lying on her knee must be a jest, it could not be true—a jest of course, a coarse, cruel, horrible jest, and a great shuddering sob came from her lips. She read it again, and this time her senses seemed quicker, the very beat of her pulse was a pain; this time she could understand; he had left her forever—all her sweet

love story—all her happiness, all her love had ended abruptly had ceased to exist.

Not alone—he was not alone; he had left England forever, and he had taken with him Vivian, Countess of Lynn, beautiful and guilty, the partner of his flight. If one could realize what the intrusion of a black serpent into a nest of white doves would be, what the horror of a tiger in the midst of a fold of white lambs, it would be possible then to imagine something of the horror and repulsion that came over her as she realized the words. In thought, word, and deed, she was as pure and innocent as the white lilies that grew at her feet; she was utterly ignorant of the world of sin—it was an unknown world to her, and quite suddenly, without any fault of hers, she is plunged in the very midst of it; she, who has never known the breath of evil, finds herself face to face with the darkest, foulest sin—so black, so foul, so unutterably horrible that she cannot at first realize or understand it. Gradually, as the mist clears from her brow and her thoughts grow distinct, she realizes it, she understands, and the wonder is that she did not die under the weight of horror and shame.

He—the beloved husband, the father of her beautiful children—has forsaken her, has left her and left them, has gone away with some one else; and tells her that the sin, though a great one, is a common one. When she realizes it, the pure, beautiful, womanly soul rises in horror; life seems to come back to the silent figure, her face burns with a hot blush, her heart beats, her whole frame trembles. She drops the letter, and falling on her knees with a bitter cry, she says,—

"Oh, Heaven help me to bear it! help me or I must die!"

The sun never shone on a sadder sight than that fair young wife and mother, whose golden head was bent in such unutterable shame and sorrow. Heaven grant that few women may shed such hot, bitter tears as hers. It was a passion of grief that exhausted her, and long after her tears ceased to flow she knelt there, unable to rise, uncertain what to do next.

At present the secret was her own, but she would have to face her household she would have to face the world; she could not keep the secret of her sorrow and her shame; perhaps outside of Dunwold every one knew of it; it must be in the papers. Vivian Countess of Lynn! She never remembered even to have heard the name, and yet the woman who bore it had taken her husband from her.

Beautiful and guilty. Ah! could he but guess, this beloved

husband of hers, what those few words would make her suffer; and then she found that she was only at the beginning of her pain; hitherto she had been stunned, she had felt, but it was as a muffled drum beats; now the last torture of jealousy was added—"beautiful" and guilty.

He had found another beautiful, who once found her all fair; he loved another, who had sworn to love her—and her only. While she had roamed through the house, wandering restlessly, without sleep or food, he had been with this other woman—"beautiful and guilty." While she knelt before his picture crying to him with outstretched arms, longing for him as the flowers long for sunlight and dew, he had been with this other, giving the kisses and caresses that belonged of right to her.

There seem to be many needless forms of suffering in this world. One wonders why the dove with its "white white breast" should be tortured, why the sweet singing-bird with bright plumage should be shut in with cruel bars; why the pretty brown hares should be caught and maimed in the horrible traps; but one wonders most of all why a pure, innocent, and loving woman should be shamed and tortured without any fault of her own. What had this beautiful, hapless lady done that the crown of wifehood and womanhood should be torn from her brows?—that the pure and true love of her life should be turned into sorrowful shame? And yet she was not alone, Hundreds of women as loving, beautiful, innocent, and true, had the same thing to suffer.

So the sun shone on an agony that words cannot paint. There are many sorrows—the bitterness of death; the tortures of jealousy; the anguish of long suffering; but there is nothing that rends the heart, that destroys all hope, that ruins a life so quickly as treachery from the one we love best.

She would have spent the day there, for she had forgotten all time, but that Bennet, feeling anxious about her—he hardly knew why—made his way to the syringa-trees; he saw the listless, weary attitude, he saw the letter, but he could not see her face.

"Are there any orders about the carriage, my lady?" he asked.

He hardly recognized the voice that answered:

"No."

"Any orders about meeting Sir Lionel, my lady?"

"No," was the low, faint reply, and the old man longed, with all his heart, to ask where his master was and what had

detained him, but he dared not. He lingered for a few minutes, thinking my lady would speak to him, but she, usually so gracious and kind, seemed to be completely unconscious of his presence.

"Something wrong," said the old man to himself. "There is no keeping these aristocrats straight. Why does he not come home? He is amusing himself somewhere while her heart is breaking. Still it is the first time I have known him do it.

There must have been a sense of something wrong in the household for the nurse met the butler, and her first question was—"what news of the master?"

"None that I can hear," was the brief reply. "I do not quite like the looks of things, Mrs. Rogers; my lady is sitting there all alone, and her manner seems quite changed; make some excuse for going to speak to her."

"I will," said the nurse; "I did not feel quite comfortable over her last night."

With her kind, homely face full of sympathy, Mrs. Rogers, knowing her lady's favorite spot, went to find her there; one look at the drooping figure and ghastly face was enough.

"My lady," she cried, "you have heard bad news."

She looked up with startled eyes.

"You are right," she said; "I have heard bad news," and without another word the beautiful young mistress of Dunwold swayed to and fro, then fell with her face to the ground at the nurse's feet.

CHAPTER V.

"I KNEW it—I knew it," thought the nurse. "She has had bad news from or of him, and all her heart is wrapped up in him. I will not get a crowd of servants around her; poor lady! let her keep her secret while she can."

She raised the drooping head that was never again to be sheltered on a loving breast—with kindly hands she smoothed back the golden hair. Better to let her die, better that the blue eyes should never unclose again, better that the loving, tortured heart should cease to beat, better the chill of death than the fever of life, better the lonely grave than the lonely

house which should know her husband's face, voice and footsteps no more.

Death does not come for the wishing. Mrs. Rogers was almost startled to find that those beautiful, despairing eyes were wide open and fixed on her.

"You are ill, my lady," she said, gently—"you have bad news; you fainted just as I came up to you."

"I have very bad news, nurse," she said. "I may tell you—all the world will know it soon. My husband has left me!"

And as the hapless lady said these words her lips quivered and the hot, bitter tears rained down her face.

The nurse looked bewildered.

"Left you, my lady!" she cried. "You do not mean really that he has gone away?"

"Yes, he has gone away, never to return."

"But surely not—not with any one else, my lady?"

"Yes," she replied, in a low bitter voice—"with some one else."

"Beautiful and guilty" were the words that rose to her lips, but she did not utter them.

"Oh, my lady!" and the woman paused; her horror was too great for words. "My lady!" she gasped. "What shall you do? And you loved him so well!"

"That is it, Rogers," she said, slowly; "what *shall* I do? When husbands die and their wives bury them, kneel by their graves and weep over them, I understand; but my husband is *not* dead, except to me. I cannot put on black crape for him; he is living—laughing somewhere, perhaps, gay and happy! What shall I do? What do other wives do when their husbands forsake them? I have heard of such things, but I hardly thought they were real; I never dreamed that it would be my turn; I never thought what those wives did."

And the hapless girl turned in her agony to the older woman, who had seen and knew more of life.

'Are you quite sure, my lady, there is no mistake? It seems so impossible. Sir Lionel seemed to love the ground you stood on, and many a word is written in jest."

She shuddered.

'It is no jest—it is all perfectly true," she replied.

"Then, my lady, you should send for your father at once."

"My father?" repeated Lady Rydal. "He will be so grieved—so distressed."

"He is your nearest friend. You must send for him, my lady, and at once. He ought to be here with you, when the

news is known, to protect you. My lady, you must send a telegram to him. Oh, my lady," added the nurse, with a sudden, startled cry, "the children. I had forgotten for one moment the children—what will they do?"

"Do not speak of them just yet; and, nurse, keep Gordon from me for a little time—he has his father's eyes—they would break my heart just now. You will not say a word yet to any one. You are quite right, my father must come; and when he comes, it will not matter who knows. Shall I wake up now and find it all a dream?"

"You will not be the one to wake up, my lady; but there will be a waking up for some one."

The nurse was a kindly, homely woman, devoted to Lady Rydal. Just then she would have given something to have known the whole details of the story—with whom Sir Lionel had fled, and all about it—but she would not ask one question; she had too much regard for her mistress.

Lady Rydal stood up—there was a certain dignity about her sorrow, a certain grandeur—even the uneducated woman by her side saw it. It was no ordinary sorrow, to be treated in ordinary fashion.

"I will do what you suggest," she said. "I will send the telegram at once. Go to the children, nurse, and keep all knowledge of this quite secret until my father comes."

The nurse was almost relieved to get from that sad, wistful face, and the quiet, sorrowful eyes. "It is worse than watching any one die," she said to herself, and once more Lady Rydal was alone.

The time was come when she must do something—when she must look her terrible fate in the face; she was alone in the wide world now. In her heart she bade good-by to the beauties around her; shine of sun, bloom of flower, whisper of wind, and glitter of dew would never more have charm for her. She went back to the house, to the library; but a horrible feeling oppressed her. It was not that she was walking in her sleep, but that she was dead, yet able to speak. She wondered at her own calmness—her own apathy. She said to herself that if any one now plunged a sword in her heart, she did not think she should feel the pain.

She wrote out the telegram, from Lady Rydal, Dunwold, Kent, to Squire Gordon, Leeth; "Come to me at once, father: I am in terrible trouble. Do not delay." She rang the bell Bennet seemed anxious that no one else should wait upon his

mistress that morning but himself. Lady Rydal gave the telegram into his hands.

"This is to be sent at once," she said. "Tell Rosa I have gone to my room, and I do not wish to be disturbed until my father comes."

"I wish she would trust me," said the old servant. "I know there is something wrong about Sir Lionel, and she has sent for her father. Ah! poor young thing, this is not the first break up I have seen."

Bennet went himself to the station at Langholme, and sent off the telegram; he would not intrust it to the prying eyes of postmen or grooms. He looked at the time-tables, for he knew all about Leeth, where Squire Gordon lived on the Sussex coast—where the grand old woods stretched out to the sea, and some of the sturdy trunks were washed by the waves.

Lady Rydal went to her room; in vain Rosa asked for permission to come to her, to bring her wine; her mistress was resolute. It seemed to her that if she were compelled to stand up to speak to people, to answer questions, she should fall down dead. She had not slept for two nights; her brain was exhausted, even beyond the power of thinking. All she wanted was to turn her face to the wall, to lie still and seek oblivion; she locked the door of her room, she covered her head and face and lay down on the pillows, which seemed to be wet with her tears.

Flash along the wires that stretched through the lovely scenery, through the fair, fertile country, until it reached the pretty little town of Peerpoint, the nearest town to the beautiful estate of Leeth.

"A telegram for Leeth." A special messenger must take it, and all the employees at the station liked going to Leeth; it was the most liberal house in England; plenty of "old October," plenty of substantial meat and home-made bread. If the squire himself was about, a handsome tip; if Mrs. Gordon, who had been a great heiress and by some strange law of nature was mean in money matters—if she were about, they did not fare so well.

The messenger who rode over on this fair June morning found both the squire and his lady on the lawn. There was evidently some little difficulty on hand, for Mrs. Gordon's fine, comely face was flushed, and the squire looked unusually bright about the eyes.

"No one would think, Annie, that a woman with a face like

yours could have such a temper," the messenger heard the squire saying. "I have seen nothing like it in my life."

"Then you have seen very little in your life," retorted the lady "You seem to me to have gone through it blindfolded. You do not even see the telegram that John has been holding out to you for the last half hour."

"A telegram!" cried the squire. "Why did you not speak, John?"

"I did, your honor, but you were speaking so loudly you did not hear me."

The squire's face flushed deeper red; his lady smiled, she was pleased with John.

"A telegram!" cried the squire. "Who in the wide world can that be from?"

"The obvious thing—as least, so it would appear to any one else—is to open it and see," replied his wife.

"You are right, Annie; you are nearly always right," said the squire; and Mrs. Gordon smiled with the comfortable assurance that every married lady feels when she knows that her husband is habitually in the wrong.

"Why, Annie, listen—come here—look—why, what can be the matter?"

The squire's happy, ruddy face had suddenly grown pale; he leaned his hand heavily on his wife's shoulder.

"My dear," he cried, "what can be the matter? 'Come to me at once,' she says, 'I am in terrible trouble.' Where is her husband? Where is Sir Lionel?"

"I think," said Mrs. Gordon, gravely, "you had better go at once: she has sent for you."

"You must go with me," said the squire.

"No," said Mrs. Gordon, resolutely; "she does not mention me. She would ask for me if she wanted me. She is in great trouble and needs you. She is not my own child, you know, squire; I might intrude."

"She is a woman and you are a woman, and she is in trouble," cried the squire. "Surely it does not matter whose child she is?"

"I know my place," said the lady, with an assumption of meekness that at any other time would have made the stout old squire tremble. "When your daughter sends for me I shall go—not until then."

At another time the squire would have continued the argument, for they very much enjoyed an occasional dispute, but

just now he was anxious over his beautiful and beloved young daughter.

"She has the best husband in the world," he said, "or I should fear something was wrong with him. I wish she said more. Where is he? Why does she send for me?"

"Perhaps they have quarrelled," said Mrs. Gordon, with a gleam in her eyes that the squire wisely avoided. "Married people *do*, unfortuately, quarrel at times."

"I could sooner fancy two doves tearing each other to pieces," said the squire.

"Perhaps if the truth were known, the turtle doves have an occasional spar, but then we do not understand their language. Now, squire, you have no time to lose, you must go by the twelve train, and you will reach Dunwold by four; you must take your portmanteau, and sufficient in it for two or three days; indeed, as you do not know what is the matter, you cannot tell when you will return."

"It is very awkward," said the squire; "those clover fields down by the bridge want mowing, and I promised to see Tarrant about the haymakers. Poor Elinore, what can be wrong? She would not send for me if she were ill."

"No; in that case she would send for me," said Mrs. Gordon, with dignity; "it is trouble, not illness."

With great effort, with many a sharp arrow shot home, the good squire was started off in time to meet the midday train. And all the way to Dunwould he was occupied in trying to think what could possibly be wrong with his daughter.

CHAPTER VI.

Squire Gordon asked no questions when he entered the magnificent mansion of Dunwold. Everything looked, as usual, in the most perfect order—nothing was changed. There was the brilliant sunshine, the bright-hued flowers, the green trees, the superb rooms, the servants in their rich livery—there was no trace of anything wrong. No one seeing Dunwold in that hour would have dreamed that the shame and darkness of a tragedy hung over it.

Bennet came forward at once, and it was in the face of that faithful old servant that the squire first saw a certainty of wrong.

"Where is Lady Rydal?" asked the squire. "Is she ill?"

"She is in her own room——"

The squire interrupted him again.

"Where is Sir Lionel?" he cried.

"I do not know, sir. My master went to town two or three days since, and has not yet returned."

"Now why," thought the squire, "why did she not send for him instead of me?"

Said Bennet,—

"My lady wished me to ask you to go to her in her own room as soon as you came."

"She is ill, then!" he cried.

A terrible feeling of dread was creeping over him; it would have been a relief to him in that moment to have heard that she was ill, and to know that illness was the worst calamity he had to fear. The next minute the squire was standing outside his daughter's door, with a curious sensation upon him, his heart beating as it had not done for years, and strange to say, a half longing that his wife, with her strong mind and sharp tongue, were with him.

He rapped, and a voice that he hardly recognized, asked:

"Is it you, father? Come in."

She stood before him, tall, slender and erect in the passionate dignity of her despair, her face white, her eyes dark with sorrow. She crossed her hands on her breast.

"Father," she said slowly, "my husband has left me forever—has gone away out of my life. What am I to do?"

The squire fell back thunderstruck. Of all the possible evils or events this had never dawned across him.

"He has gone," she repeated, "he has left me. I shall never see him again." Her face lost its marble pallor, a flame as of fire seemed to pass over it. "I must tell you the worst quickly," she added; "he has not gone alone."

It seemed to the squire as though the very heavens were falling around him. Here was his beautiful, fair daughter, always so bright and loving, a wreck of herself—pale, trembling, like a white lily stricken by lightning; her husband—handsome, debonair, kindly Sir Lionel, who had been the most devoted of lovers, the most devoted of husbands—gone. He was literally speechless; the only thing he clearly understood was his daughter's agony and distress. He drew her to him and kissed the quivering face on which such anguish dwelt; he laid her head on his breast, and caressed the golden

hair, his strong heart beating with emotion. There are some loves in this world which never fail—the love of a father such in the squire had for his danghter is one.

"My darling Elinore, what it it? Have you quarrelled with Lionel?"

"No, papa, never! I have never had one word with him; I loved him too much."

"Has there been any coolness—have you vexed him? There must be something; tell me all about it, Elinore."

"I have nothing to tell, papa. He left me three days since, and there was nothing between us but love; he kissed me, and I went with him to the terrace; there was no coolness. Oh, papa, how could there be any coolness between us, my love and I?"

She raised her miserable face to his, and the anguish in it almost killed him.

"Papa, do *you* believe that I shall never see him again? What will my eyes rest on? What shall I do? Oh, Heaven, what shall I do?"

She fell from his arms on her knees—she wrung her hands wildly—she tore the shining golden hair—she was as one mad with a mighty anguish.

"Elinore!" cried the squire; "oh, my darling, look up! Tell me what is wrong. You will break my heart. Where has Lionel gone? I do not understand yet. Shall I go after him?"

She raised her hand with a gesture of passionate despair.

"You do not understand, papa. I did not at first. Read this," and she put Sir Lionel's letter into his hand.

As he read it all the passion of a strong man outraged rose in his heart, the color died from his face, the veins on his forehead were swollen like whipcord, the hands that held the letter trembled like those of a weak woman, and when he had read it a curse, horrible to hear, fell from his white lips. He looked so terrible in his mighty wrath, that a new fear came to the weeping girl.

"You will not kill him!" she cried—"you will not kill him, papa!"

"Kill him!" cried the squire. "I would lash him to death. I would shake the cowardly, miserable life out of him."

"I love him—I love him!" cried the unhappy girl, "and he has left me forever." Her moaning cries seemed to madden the squire.

"Elinore, for Heaven's sake, child, do not cry in that

fashion; the scoundrel to write such words, to do such a deed. My poor child, my beautiful Elinore; try and be calm, my dear. Who is this Vivian Countess of Lynn?"

"I have never heard her name," she answered. "I cannot think who she can be, where he can have met her. I—I—cannot believe that he cared for her, he seemed to love me so much, he did indeed, papa; he was so kind, and so loving to me, I cannot think he loves any one but me."

"My poor Elimore," sighed the squire, "I knew there were villains called men, but I never dreamed you had fallen into the hands of one."

"It would have been better if I had died on my wedding morning," she said. "What shall I do, papa?"

It was the helpless trust in him, the entire leaning upon him, that touched the squire.

"I do not see yet what you are to do, Elinore. I have lived many years, I have seen a great deal of life, but this is the first time I have stood face to face with a crime like this; a man voluntarily deserts his wife and runs away with another. I have read of such things—the horrible annals of the Divorce Court are full of them, but I thank Heaven I never was brought in contact with such a crime. I stand before earth and Heaven an honest man, and I do not know what to advise you at present."

"What do other wives do when their husbands desert them?" she asked.

"My dear Elinore, I do not know; as I have told you before, I have never had the least experience of such criminal matters. To my way of thinking, the man who deserts his wife ought to be shot dead. I would not give him a moment's grace. Such a man ought not to live."

But the picture of the husband she loved so much lying with his face on the ground, shot dead, brought no comfort to the wounded heart.

"I must have time to think," said the squire. "Do not cry so bitterly, Elinore, you will kill yourself. You must think of the children. Great Heaven! why the man must be mad to leave those children." And the squire stood looking helplessly at his daughter.

"What will the world say?" he cried, after a few minutes; "what a wicked, heartless thing to do. It is a thousand times more cruel than if he had killed you at once."

"Yes, more cruel," she moaned—"a thousand times more

cruel. Life will be for me a living death. It will be a long torture; what shall I do?"

It was the continual repetition of this question that drove the squire frantic; he had not the faintest idea—he was like a child lost in a wood.

"The man must have been mad," he cried over and over again, "to leave his wife and his children—to leave such a house as this—to break through all the ties of honor—to break a living heart, and all for what—love of some silly painted face—a fancy that will wear off in a month—he must be mad. Have you noticed any change in him, Elinore?"

"None," she replied; "he was always the same, loving and kind to me. I saw no change."

"Was there nothing to rouse your suspicions? A man falls by degrees; he does not rush from his home and run away with another woman without having wooed her—without having made love to her, or fancied her; there must have been some acquaintance, some arrangement; he must have thought about her—have written to her—have spoken to her. Try to remember, Elinore."

She shook her head with a desponding sigh, No; she could remember nothing. She seldom, if ever, opened the post-bag, and she had never troubled to looked at her husband's letters; she had trusted him with the great loving faith that belongs to such a heart as hers. The faintest gleam of suspicion had never dawned across her mind.

"We must do our best," said the squire, kissing his daughter's pale, beautiful face. "I wonder if any one knows it yet."

"Not here; only Rogers, the nurse; I was obliged to tell her, and she said I must send for you at once."

"If Vivian Countess of Lynn is any one of note," said the squire, "the whole world will soon know; it will be in all the papers. If there be an Earl of Lynn we shall hear from him. I am quite sure, Elinore, he is mad! My dear, you must not dwell upon it; you must try to forget it for a few minutes. Come downstairs with me; I want something after my long journey. Come with me."

But she stood before him, pale, stricken, and wringing her hands.

"I cannot," she said. "Do not ask me! Leave me here alone; the sight of human faces and the sound of human voices would kill me. When I am better I will come."

In her face he saw the truth of her words, and he urged her no more.

"Go," she said; "Bennet will attend to you, papa. Come back to me."

But when the squire found his favorite wines and favorite dishes, he could neither eat nor drink; his very soul was sick with sorrow for his daughter, and astonished, angry rage against her husband.

He longed to follow him, to find him, to rush him, to catch him by the throat and fling him away like dirt, to shoot him: strong and brave as was the young baronet, he would have fared but badly had he fallen into the old squire's hands just then.

It was incredible to him that such a thing should or could be. He vowed to himself that the man who thus destroyed two women, ruined two households, broke two hearts, was a more cruel murderer than a man who gave poision or used a revolver, and ought to be hung for the crime.

His daughter had sent for him—she trusted entirely to him. She and her little children were thrown on his hands, and he knew no more what to do than one of the children themselves. An idea suddenly occurred to him—he would send for Norton, the family solicitor, he would know what to advise; after all it required a lawyer to see any way clear at all through such an entanglement.

He sent a telegram to John Norton, Lincoln's Inn, asking him to come down to Dunwold without delay, and that same evening the family solicitor, full of wonder and amaze, reached the Hall.

The squire met him, and the squire told him the news, which at first he refused to believe, and when he found it was true he shared the squire's opinion, that it was the most mysterious affair that had ever come under his notice, and the most pitiful.

CHAPTER VII.

ANOTHER day dawns at Dunwold, and by this time a rumor has spread through the household that there is something wrong. The servants speak with hushed voices—they move silently as though some one lay dead in the house—even the happy voics of the children have been hushed.

"Mamma was ill, and could not bear a noise."

Gordon clamored for his papa. The handsome young father had made such a pet and plaything of the child that he pined for him, and the nurse silenced his cries.

Over the beautiful, stately rooms there was an air of loneliness and desolation.

Jules, Sir Lionel's valet, had nothing to do, and added to the general confusion by wondering what his master was doing, and where he was.

Lady Rydal came downstairs that morning, but no one would have recognized in the pale-stricken girl, the beautiful, brilliant mistress of Dunwold.

"It will kill her," thought the laywer, as his eyes fell on her face. He took her hand; but hard, cold and conventional as he was. he could utter no word.

She looked at them both in despair, and pointed to a paper she held in her hands.

"The whole world knows it now," she said; "we need not discuss it with closed doors and hushed voices. Father, you must take me home, and let me die there."

Both gentlemen rose; the lawyer drew a chair for her, the squire placed her in it, and stood by her side, then placed one arm round her shoulders, and held her hands tightly clasped in his.

"I will take care of you, my dear," he said, in a trembling voice—"trust to me: you and your little children shall be my care as long as I live. I am not a man of many words, but rest assured I will protect and avenge you. Now, let us hear what the paper says. Courage, Elinore; time heals all wounds."

"It will never heal mine," she said—"my heart is broken."

In after years she often thought of the scene. They had gone to the library, one of the finest rooms in Dunwold—a long lofty room, with a magnificent ceiling painted after Gribbon; four long windows opened on to a sloping green lawn, that led to the banks of the River Wolde; the walls were covered with books and pictures; the furniture was artistic, and quite in keeping with the room. The windows were all thrown open, and the summer wind, laden with the fragrance of the mignonette, came in; a bird was singing in one of the great green boughs; butterflies flew amongst the roses; and she remembered every detail as does a condemmed man of the hall wherein his sentence is read.

Lady Rydal was seated near the open window, her father

close to her, and Mr. Norton moved restlessly from place to place.

"All the world knows it now," she repeated. "I am that most unfortunate, most hapless of all beings, a deserted wife. Oh, love, how could you wound me so?"

She gave the newspaper to Mr. Norton, and pointed to the paragraph. He read it aloud.

Alas! how many such have been written!—how many bitter tears have fallen over them! No journal, no paper comes from the press now without containing at least one such terrible record; for the good old days, when the purity of women and the honor of men ranked high, are dying out.

It read thus,—

"SCANDAL IN HIGH LIFE.—The whole fashionable world is thrown into a state of consternation by the elopement of a young and beautiful countess, who had left her home and her husband. The lady in question was one of the queens of society during the last season. The companion of her flight is a handsome, talented wealthy young baronet, who, sad to say, leaves a beautiful young wife and children. It is said that a divorce is in contemplation, and that the fugitives will avail themselves of the services of the Court, and re-appear in England as man and wife. But surely Society will pause and think before it allows its very well-springs to be poisoned! Further information as to this terrible scandal will be given in our next edition."

Mr. Norton read the words clearly and distinctly; the sound of them mingled with the song of the bird and the rustle of the green boughs. To the delicate, refined, sensitive lady, whose heart and soul were as pure as those of a dreaming child, it was, indeed, a death warrant. She turned to the squire with an expression on her face he never forgot.

"Can it be possible," she asked, "that the man spoken of here is my husband? It seems to be a strange, hideous dream. It cannot be my Lionel of whom that paper speaks; he was with me not many days since, and now they speak of him as of one abandoned and a stranger to all goodness. My Lionel! Why, we knelt together last Sunday at church, praying for all sinners and wanderers; and now they say he has taken away another man's wife, and has left me."

"I am afraid it is but too true, my dear," said the squire. "Now, Norton, *what* are we to do?"

But the lawyer was in his way quite as uncertain as they; the legal aspects of the case were all right,—the moral ones he could hardly estimate.

"Lady Rydal does not know what to do, and I am quite at a loss how to advise her. You see, Norton, you must take the helm of the ship and steer us through."

"You speak as though settling upon a certain course of action would make everything straight, squire. It is not so. I do not see, in a case like this, that there is anything to be done except to be patient."

"But there must be something done. Is my daughter here to die of a broken heart? Is that villain to escape all punishment?"

"He will be punished severely enough when he comes to his senses," said the lawyer, dryly. "Lady Rydal has the matter quite in her own hands. She can sue for a divorce on the evidence of this letter alone."

"Nay," said Lady Rydal, with scornful dignity, "I shall never do that."

"Then Sir Lionel will never be able to marry Lady Lynn." She turned to him with flashing eyes.

"Sir," she said, "I beg you do not talk the jargon of the world to me. I believe in the commandments of Heaven. How could my husband—being my husband—marry another?"

"If the law frees you from him, Lady Rydal."

"The law *cannot*," she said. "No one has power to place the human above the Divine law. No one can put asunder those whom Heaven has joined."

"But," said Mr. Norton, "your husband himself has broken those ties."

"He cannot;" she said, and through all her despair shone the very sublimity of faith. "He cannot, the ties were formed by Heaven, and man cannot break them. Papa!" she cried, suddenly—"I am sure you think I am right. It is hard enough to be deserted—it is worse to be divorced."

"He ought to be shot," cried the squire. "No, of course you cannot. You shall not drag your name through the horrors of the Divorce Court; all the eyes in England shall not gloat over my daughter's misery."

"If you do not seek that remedy," said the lawyer, "I know no other."

"There is no remedy," she said; "the only thing would be to find him."

"Find him!" cried the squire. "Why, my Elinore, you would not surely take him back? You would not forgive him?"

"I cannot tell. I only know that I love him better than my life," and the two men looked pityingly at the fair young creature whose life was so terribly blighted.

"What on earth has the man done it for?" cried the squire, appealing to the lawyer. "Could he have a more beautiful, a more loving wife than this?"

"I should imagine this countess to be a modern Delilah," said Mr. Norton. The lawyer was not a particularly tender-hearted man, but he longed to be away from the sight of that beautiful, colorless face and strained sorrowful eyes; he knew there was no help for her, and that no one could comfort her whose love had gone from her.

"Then I am to understand quite clearly, Lady Rydal, that you will not apply for a divorce?"

"No, never, Mr. Norton."

"You quite understand that if you succeed, as you would be sure to do, and the Earl of Lynn obtains a divorce, that Sir Lionel could marry the lady with whom he has left England · and you would be free to marry again according to law. I do not speak of anything more than that—I say simply according to law."

"I understand," she said, calmly, "but that will never be. My husband has deserted me, but I will be true to myself. Father, you will help me. I must be true to myself. I shall seek neither divorce nor re-marriage- -both are equally horrible to me. My husband has left me, but he has left me my children, and I must live for them."

"She is made of the right metal," said the lawyer to himself; "how mad the man must have been to leave her!"

"I think," said the squire slowly, "that my daughter is right; she will best keep her dignity so; she had done no wrong, yet the world is so cruel, so censorious, that every one would find something to say about a deserted wife. She will best maintain her dignity by refraining from all such steps and bearing her sorrow in patience."

Lady Rydal turned away sick at heart; no one could understand her sorrow. She loved her husband with all her heart; she longed, with a sick, dull craving, to die; and they talked to her about divorce and re-marriage, about dignity and patience, while her heart was bleeding.

"By this time all London is ringing with the story," said

the squire. "Norton, you know everybody; I have never troubled myself much about the aristocracy. Who is the Earl of Lynn?"

"I know little of him except that he is an old man, over sixty, I am sure, that he is very wealthy, and that his town house is called 'Argus House.'"

"Do you know anything of the countess?"

"No, only that her photograph, last season, was in every shop window in London. She was the rage for two or three months, and that she is exceedingly beautiful, with a dark, Spanish loveliness. Half the men in London lost their senses over her."

Lady Rydal fell with her face forward; that seemed to her the most bitter drop in her cup. She had borne the rest; but that her rival should be so beautiful that all men loved her, was horrible to bear. It was, perhaps, this dark, fatal beauty, which had lured him from her. She pictured him, the husband she loved with all her heart, delighting in the beauty of her rival, and she could not bear it.

"It will kill her," said the lawyer.

"The most merciful thing, too," cried the squire. "Oh, my beautiful child!—my dear, loving, beautiful child! If ever I meet that man he dies!"

The squire rang the bell, and sent for the lady's maid.

"Your lady is in great trouble, Rosa," he said. "She has fainted, I fear. I wish," cried the good squire, with an outburst of passionate emotion, "I wish to Heaven her own mother was alive. I do not understand—I do not know how to comfort her."

"There is no comfort for such a sorrow as hers," said the lawyer. "We had better leave her. I pronounce this the most extraordinary case that has ever come under my notice, and I am sure he has not left her because he did not love her."

"He shall repent it," said the squire. "No good will come to England while men can do such deeds—and yet be free."

CHAPTER VIII.

THAT same day the news spread all over the household and all over the country. It was received in the same fashion by every one—with the utmost wonder and incredulity. At first

every one refused to believe it; Sir Lionel had been a model husband; many a tired and careworn matron envied his wife, not so much for her fresh, brilliant young beauty as for the devotion and indulgent love of her husband Dunwold had been looked upon as a model home—the one paradise where no discomfort, no discord ever entered. Every dweller in the country was proud of Dunwold and its beautiful mistress; the news came upon them like a thunderbolt. Sir Lionel—the handsome, gallant young nobleman—had actually deserted his wife! It was a blot on the county, an outrage on society, a crime not to be passed over, never to the forgotten.

The squire and the lawyer saw at once that the servants knew what had happened, and they behaved well; they clung to their unhappy mistress, they served her with redoubled zeal and devotion; they spoke no evil of him, they had none to speak. Until this unfortunate event happened, Sir Lionel had been perfection in all his relationships; a better master could not have been found—kind, generous, considerate, open-handed; they spoke of him with lowered voices. Alas! that he should have fallen so far in their eyes.

They said not a word against him—they seemed to have an instinct that it would but hurt her the more; if they spoke of the event at all, it was as of a mystery. The women all agreed, however, that it was his companion's fault—they were quite sure of that; she was beautiful, and she had tempted him, as they agreed, "when a woman was inclined to go wrong she would go, and no one could pervent her." They said nothing more than that. No need to tell how the story flew like wildfire over county and town—how the men discussed it with avidity at their clubs, the ladies with keen appreciation in their drawing-rooms; it was a nine days' wonder, a jest for everybody, even to the loungers in the stable-yard and the cabmen gathered on the ranks. *She* had been so famous for her beauty, even the common people had crowded to look at her; her name then had been on every lip; but now the tone of voice with which that name was mentioned was quite changed.

No truer sign of degenerate days could be found than the way in which that story was received. A few good women heard it with tears in their eyes, thinking of the stricken, desolate wife; the majority told it as an old story, and laughed over it. A jealous, cross old earl had lost a beautiful young wife—a lovely, laughing woman, who had queened it royally over the hearts of men—had gone off with a lover!

Gray-haired men, who ought to have gone on their knees,

praying Heaven to pardon such crimes, laughed with a sneer; they had known so many such cases; they outvied each other in relating similar incidents; they looked upon it as rather a good jest in its way.

There are many horrible sights in this world; perhaps the most horrible is that of old men near the grave laughing over that which deserves tears. The young ones were not so bad; they said what a common thing it was, nowadays, for a man to make a mistake and run away with another man's wife; they wondered how long it would last; who would tire first—the beautiful countess or her lover. Some rather envied him, and considered that he had made himself a popular man. In all that laughter-loving, wicked world, there was no one who gave the sin its right name—not one.

The women discussed it at length; the probabilities of divorce, the interest of the case, if it would be heard in court, the amount of damages, the probability of the re-marriage of any concerned. Sir Lionel would wed the beautiful countess if it were possible; and then it was interesting and instructive to discuss whether Society would receive them or not. Rosy lips that looked pure and beautiful enough for prayer and praise, discussed the unsavory subject in all its details.

No one spoke much of Lady Rydal, the fact of Sir Lionel's marriage was not widely known; he had not married a fashionable lady, or the whole world would have known of it. Squire Gordon was not known out of his own county, and in the terrible drama at which the London world was laughing with hysterical laughter, the wrongs of his beautiful daughter were perhaps of the least account.

The earl met with some sympathy from the ladies, but then, as they said, what could he expect, marrying a girl so young, and so—so—unlike others? Little was said of the deserted wife—it is a strange feature in human nature that the wife in these cases seldom receives the sympathy due to her, above all if the husband be young and handsome.

Few people know that the hero of the last London romance was married, few had seen his wife, and few cared; it added piquancy to the story, that was all.

While Society was amusing itself, and Society journals were outvying each other in audacious paragraphs, the calm of despair seemed to have settled over Dunwold.

A letter from Sir Lionel was received by Mr. Norton while he was at Dunwold. It was forwarded from his offices in London. It was not much like the letter of a daring and success

ful lover, it was full of gloom and recklessness. It gave no details, but was written from Paris. Sir Lionel said that he was on his way to the Continent, and that many years would elapse before he returned to England, if he returned at all. In the meantime his income—a very handsome one of forty thousand per annum—was to be equally divided between his wife, Elinore Gordon, and himself. The money belonging to him was to be sent to his bankers, and he would send as he wanted it; the money that was his wife's portion was to be sent regularly to her. He wished her to remain at Dunwold until his son was of age. He had made his will—Squire Gordon, Mr. Norton, and his great friend, Sir Hutton Dilke, were the three executors, and to them he left the charge of his wife and children. Lady Rydal's wishes were to be consulted in everything; she was to be entire mistress until her son came of age.

"It looks to me," said Mr. Norton to the squire, "as though he had very little notion of ever returning." The letter said no word of anything else—made no mention of his companion, and spoke of himself as one quite out of the pale. There was something in the gloomy, reckless tone that in some vague way made the lawyer pity him.

"That is not the letter of a happy man," he said to himself, "there is a mystery in this case. If I had not seen in his own writing that he had taken the Countess of Lynn with him, I should have said that he was alone and miserable." Mr. Norton went back to town after having made all the arrangements possible. His advice to Lady Rydal was to leave Dunwold, but she looked so miserable when he spoke of it, and clung with such tenacity to the old home wherein she had been so happy, that he had not the heart to say more.

"It will kill her, and she will die here," he thought; "better perhaps for a wounded dove to die in its nest than to flutter away and die in strange scenes."

Mr. Norton went, and the squire was irresolute. He did not know what to do; he could not leave his daughter, for the very apathy of death had fallen over her, and he hesitated about sending for his wife. "It was so very uncertain," he owned to himself, "how she would take it; whether she would fly into a rage and declare herself disgraced, or whether she would hasten to Dunwold full of kindness, love and sympathy. If I only knew how to manage her—how to take her," he thought to himself; "it all depends on the way in which I take her—she has to be approached with caution."

A far more clever man than the good squire would have been bewildered and uncertain as to how to take the second Mrs. Gordon. It was a matter that required management, but Lady Rydal grew so ill, he saw that he must do something, and that at once. She made no complaint but she was like one on whom the shadow of death has fallen. She grew thin and white, the light was dying from her beautiful eyes, the color from her beautiful face; no smile ever came from those pale lips—no sound of laughter, of mirth, or pleasant word. If the squire, whose heart ached over his beloved child, tried to cheer her, she had but one answer for him and it was,—"I shall die soon; my heart is slowly bleeding to death." And that was the impression she gave every one, that under the weight of her sorrow she must die soon.

The most pitiful sight of all was when she turned with a terrible shudder from little Gordon's face; it was so like her husband's—the loving, laughing blue eyes—the very glance of them pierced her soul and turned her heart faint.

Slowly but surely Lady Rydal was fading away. She saw no one; friends called, who would have sympathized with her, but she could not see them; she shrank even from the laughter and the voices of the children. No sorrow was like her sorrow. She lay through the long night too wretched for tears and cries, moaning out her love and her sorrow; she passed through the long day torn with an anguish and despair.

"She will just turn her face to the wall and die some day," said the nurse to the squire; "something ought to be done to save her."

Then the squire took heart of grace and sent for his wife; she came at once. He had not known what depths of womanly tenderness lay under the cold, comely exterior. He never forgot the meeting when Mrs. Gordon came into the drawing-room where Lady Rydal was lying—trying to read, but really dreaming over and over again of the happy days of her love and her youth. She looked with horror at the white face.

"You do not mean to tell me that is Elinore Rydal," she cried. "Oh, child! what has been done to you—how have they hurt you—what have they done?"

She drew the golden head to her breast; she kissed the pale face.

"They have wounded you sorely," she said, "cry out your sorrow here; oh, child, they had better have put out your eyes and blinded you; they had better have plunged a sword in your breast."

And the girl who had never loved her stepmother, lay meekly enough now with her head on her breast. Tears fell from Mrs. Gordon's eyes; "You are like a wounded dove, a broken lily," she continued, "how could any man torture one so loving, so fair, so gentle? Squire," she added, turning to that astonished gentleman with sudden vivacity—he was electrified. "Squire, you should have sent for me before, no man could manage a case like this. Do you not see, poor soul, poor child, her heart is breaking for love of him, and breaking for loss of him? Don't you see that while she feels her wrong so keenly, she cannot bear one word against him? and you swear, I know you do, whenever you mention him."

"There is not a man living," she continued, raising her head proudly, "not one who would have the tact, the sense, the reason, the diplomacy to manage such a case."

"Heaven bless the woman," cried the squire, "she is a perfect tornado."

But that same evening Lady Rydal was better; tornadoes are sometimes beneficial.

CHAPTER IX.

While Elinore is gradually regaining health under her stepmother's gentle care, a few words will suffice to tell how she became the wife of Sir Lionel Rydal.

The squire, Angus Gordon, was the last of a grand old family—the Gordons of Leeth. Originally of Scotch descent, they had settled in England, and intermarried with the English until nothing really Scotch was left but the name.

Angus Gordon was the very model of an English squire; he lived in a grand old mansion, and he kept up a grand estate. He had been twice married; his first wife, Jennie Balfour, died when her daughter Elinore was born. She was one of those fair, sweet, gentle women who are too good to live—too sweet for earth. The squire worshipped her; he never said a cross word to her; he never even frowned at her. She was so gentle, so patient, that she almost succeeded in making him patient—a fact most surprising to him. He mourned sincerely for some years, until fate threw the somewhat matronly heiress, Annie Langton, in his way. The squire was

still a handsome man, and Miss Langton liked him. He married her, and found out afterwards that during the remainder of his life he would never have cause to complain of too much quiet. The second Mrs. Gordon was a good woman, kind in some things, generous in some fashions, mean in others. She was very clever in the management of a large establishment; she was truthful and sincere; but she had what her neighbors called a lively temper.

At times the squire said, laughingly, that it gave additional zest to his life, he never knew quite where to have her. When he went to her, expecting kindly words, or words of approbation, she was sure to be cross: when he expected her to be angry, and had made up his mind in what fashion to bear it, she would be as sweet as a summer breeze.

He had been married many years, but he had never ceased feeling astonished at her variety, and never felt quite sure as to how he would find her. Still they lived happily as a whole. The squire described their household as a lively one; servants loved their frank, imperious mistress; the only drawback was that Elinore never really loved her stepmother, nor did the second Mrs. Gordon ever really love the child. The squire explained it to himself by saying that they did not assimilate; he had a hazy and general kind of idea that the word explained away all difficulty.

There was no outward rebellion or disputes; the fair little Elinore was most obedient and most docile, but she never quite, in the depths of her heart, loved the woman who had her mother's place, and she never could endure having the squire angrily spoken to.

Then the second Mrs. Gordon would have liked a family, and she did not love the little Elinore any more from the fact that she had no children of her own.

Leeth was a picturesque, beautiful spot—one of the oldest estates in England; no one knew the antiquity of the grand trees that grew down to the very edge of the sweet southern sea that washes the coast of Sussex—a whispering silvery sea that seems to kiss the land it loves. The house was built of gray stone—a fine old manor house, with oaken floors and a fine oaken staircase, with grand oriel windows and broad corridors. The outer walls were covered with great clusters of ivy and creeping flowers. The chief beauty of Leeth was its famous avenue of limes; they were famous in story and song; every artist knew the limes of Leeth, every poet had sung of them.

Next to her father, the little Elinore loved this avenue of limes better than anything in the wide world. It was her favorite place; each grand tree was like a familiar friend to her. She watched them with loving eyes from the day on which the dainty green buds and blossoms formed until the leaf was in its full glory. She saw how the birds loved to build their nests there—how the bees seemed to have made it their rendezvous. And there was not a much prettier picture to be found than that of the fair-haired little child under the great green trees; no other spot in the park, gardens, or grounds was so fair to her as this. There she read her fairy tales, dressed her dolls, wove all her sweet fancies, dreamed her sweet dreams. It was here, under the limes, that she had walked with her lover, and deemed herself the happiest maiden in the wide world. She never left home, she was never sent to school—the squire had loved her too much to part with her. She had a governess at home, and at times Mr. and Mrs. Gordon took her to the Continent.

She grew up sheltered from all sorrow and care, as is the white bud of a lily by its green leaves. Nothing evil, nothing sorrowful came near her. Although the second Mrs. Gordon felt at times a strange, if not jealous, dislike against the squire's daughter, she was very indulgent to her; the squire, with every one of his friends, servants, and dependents, worshipped her. The only wonder is that she was not perfectly spoiled.

At the age of seventeen she was one of the loveliest girls in England—fair as a rose, bright with health and intelligence, having a spiritual, gentle nature of her own that evil could not touch. At the age of seventeen Squire Gordon took her with him to Langholme to one of the hunt balls, a party of guests from Lord Braddon's were there, amongst them Sir Lionel Rydal.

"Happy," says the old proverb—"happy's the wooing that's not long a doing."

Sir Lionel fell in love with her the first moment he saw her—by no means a calm and tranquil love, but a passionate mad worship that knew no limits, no bounds, and she loved him just as much. For one whole happy year he wooed her. A week after meeting her he had gone straight to Squire Gordon and asked if he might marry her. The squire told him in his blunt fashion that he must be mad to think of such a thing. The young lover answered that he was mad, if love and worship of the most beautiful girl in England could make him so. The squire, who could not endure the sight of tears in Elinore's

sweet eyes, consented that they should be engaged if it pleased them; but he would not hear of the word marriage until she was eighteen.

The "young lord lover" stormed and raged; it was all in vain, the squire would not change his decision.

It was then that the squire found how little, after all, he had really known of his wife's infinite variety of temper. She was never two minutes in the same mind about the matter. When the squire spoke of marriage, and said that perhaps it would be best after all, to let them have their troubles while they were young, she looked at him with solemn eyes, and told him that a young man married was a young man marred. If he spoke of the necessity of their knowing more of each other, she replied, that no evil on earth was so great as a long engagement; he could not fix her in any way, he could not pin her down to one set of opinions. He believed she was reserving herself, so that, no matter how the affair ended, she would be able to say —"I told you so."

In some fashion or other the lovers lived through the year; the squire never knew whether to sigh or smile when he thought about them. Every two or three months Sir Lionel made a regular siege; he would go down to Leeth and protest that he would not leave the place until the time of his probation was shortened.

Then again the squire's amazement would be great: if he said that he did not like so much demonstration—it was too much to last—his wife would argue that from the abundance of the heart the mouth must speak; if, on the contrary, he said that he must admit Sir Lionel was a most devoted lover, she would reply, that such warm love never lasted. She was quite a study to the squire, who wondered always if it would be possible for once to make her agree with him.

There was never a prettier love story, never such beautiful young lovers—so fair, so happy—never such a beautiful wooing. Well might Elinore love the rippling, murmuring limes; she heard sweeter words underneath their shade than were ever whispered before or since; a happy summer, the light of which would go down with her whole life and brighten it for her. There was no cloud in her sky, no shadow;—happy love and happy lovers. It ended in a happy wedding, at which the squire excelled himself in the gorgeous presents that he made to his daughter, and Mrs. Gordon found herself famous in the country by the gift of the magnificent parure of diamonds which she accompanied with somewhat singular words.

"I have a queer temper, child," she said, "and at times the very sight of you has irritated me, because I had no child of my own; but here is a gift fit for a young princess, my dear, and Heaven give you health, strength and happiness"—words which touched fair Elinore.

They had a beautiful happy wedding—all sunshine, flowers and love. It might have been the far-famed feast of roses, there was such a profusion of them. A wedding in the old church at Langholme, at which half the country were present, and of which every one talked for years afterwards. When Lady Rydal thought of her wedding-day, she saw it through a mist of sunshine, flowers and orange-blossoms—a beautiful dream. A dream of the old church, with its windows of stained glass hidden in the profusion of flowers; of her father's grand old face quivering with emotion; of her fair young bridesmaids, with their rich dresses and flowers; of her lover's handsome face, his eyes shining with love, his hand clasping hers. A dream—ah, Heaven!—how baseless, how vain a dream. Then came the honeymoon, when they had wandered through sunny lands, and she had seen but one face, had heard but one voice, had given her whole heart and soul so entirely into his keeping that she had no life apart from him.

Afterwards a happy coming home when the bells rang and the tenants came out to meet them, and there were a few weeks of festivity; the squire and Mrs. Gordon came to see them, and Sir Lionel had taken his beautiful young wife home to Leeth.

Lady Rydal never cared for a London season, perhaps had she ever passed through one, her whole life would have been different, but each year she prayed for another year's respite.

This year she would have gone, for Sir Lionel desired it, but for the baby girl; she could not leave her.

"Next year," she said, she would most certainly go. and Sir Lionel, having business in town, went himself, and alas! alas! it was during that visit the mischief was done For five beautiful, happy years she had been one of the happiest wives in England. In the whole time she had never heard one angry word from her husband, there had never been one moment's coolness, he had been her lover always, so that it was little wonder she lay sick, stunned and bewildered, when she heard that he had left her—never to return.

CHAPTER X.

FOR a short time the squire was elate, and thought he had found the remedy—believed that under the hearty, bracing atmosphere of the second Mrs. Gordon's treatment she would grow well and strong. Mrs. Gordon came out in new colors; she showed kindness, consideration, gentleness that no one would ever have credited her with; the contrast between herself and Lady Rydal was much the same as between a thistle and a soft sweet rose, but she had a true woman's nature, and she understood well the passion of love and despair raging in that gentle heart.

She knew that Lady Rydal loved her husband with an intense, passionate love such as even his unfaithfulness, his cruelty, had failed to destroy. She knew also that the whole strength of her heart rose up in hot, angry rebellion against what he had done, yet, great as was her sorrow, great as must be her indignation, she could not endure to hear one word against him, or to know that one such word was said. It was a difficult task,—as Mrs. Gordon herself had said,—quite beyond the power of man, but within the compass of woman. She knew exactly when to let her weep as though her heart would break, and not interrupt her with any useless sympathy. She knew when a few bitter words against men would in some measure make the wound seem less. She knew when the loving, tortured heart was full and must seek relief in words, then she would encourage the girl to talk about her husband and the happy days when they had wandered beneath the trees. Once she heard her singing in a low voice,—

> Oh, murm'ring trees; oh fragrant breez
> Oh waving whispering limes,
> Oh, there to be again with thee,
> My love of olden times,"

She sang it over and over again, and Mrs. Gordon knew that her heart, with her thoughts, were away under the lime trees at Leeth, and when the last words died on her lips, Lady Rydal wept as surely woman never wept before. Mrs. Gordon bore it in patience for some time, then she felt her own eyes grow dim with tears.

"Elinore," she said, trying to speak lightly, "do you know, my dear, that you will lose your eyes if you cry in that fashion! I wonder you have not washed the color from them. I wish I could make you a philosopher."

"I wish you could. I know it is foolish, but I cannot help it."

"I know that, my dear; I wish you could." She did not add, as a less wise woman would have done,—"You might shed tears for a better man"; on the contrary, she added, "You must miss him terribly, I know, Elinore, but time brings comfort for all sorrow."

Then Lady Rydal, seeing how her most bitter grief distressed the squire and his wife, tried to repress it.

She was like the pale shadow of her former self. Some kinds of sorrow lend dignity to those who suffer; hers did, her face looked like a shrine of sorrow, and she fell ill—ill unto death. Then Mrs. Gordon's good qualities came uppermost; she nursed her with courage and devotion never equalled; the squire was lost in amazement at the good qualities his wife displayed. It was an anxious time for them all, for Lady Rydal lay long between life and death. Mrs. Gordon never remembered those days without tears.

One evening, it was just after sunset, and the room where Lady Rydal lay was filled with a soft, rose light; even the pale, beautiful face on the white pillow was tinged with it. The golden hair lay unfastened; the white, transparent hands folded on her breast were like snowdrops. Mrs. Gordon was engaged in some kindly office, when a voice cried, "Mother; —I never called you mother before—come here."

Touched to the heart, Mrs. Gordon went up to her, and the white, slender hands grasped both her own; they were so slender that, with the sudden movement, the wedding-ring rolled from her finger and fell on the ground. It was a natural occurrence, but it seemed to Lady Rydal to have a supernatural meaning.

"Oh my ring!" she cried—"my ring has fallen!"

Mrs. Gordon stooped down and took it up.

"My wedding-ring!" sighed Lady Rydal, "When Lionel put that ring on my finger, I bent down and kissed it, mother; now it has fallen off. What is the old story that says—

'Those vows are all forgotten,
The ring asunder broke?'

Mine is not broken, but it has fallen—an evil omen for me."

Mrs. Gordon held the ring irresolutely in her hand.

"What shall I do with it, Elinore? Will you wear it again?"

Was it the light of the setting sun or the sudden flush of emotion that dyed her face crimson red?

"I will wear it," she said gently—"I will wear it until I die, and it must be buried with me. He has left me, but I have not left him; he loves some one else, I love only him—I shall live and die his wife. Let me put my ring on again."

She slipped it over the wasted finger, and kissed it with passionate tears. What does kill the faithful love of a faithful wife? It would seem, at times, that unkindness increases it.

In her heart Mrs. Gordon wished that the husband could but have seen the picture—the beautitul face, the thin, transparent hands, the wistful eyes fixed on the ring.

"I miss him so much," she said. "You know, mother, he seemed to enfold me with love and care; at every hour in the day I miss him, he was so caressing, so indulgent. I can never remember once that he either neglected or forgot me—I can never remember a cold or slighting word. You will laugh at me, but nothing pleases me now he is gone; he always chose the ripest fruit for me, he knew just what I liked and when I liked it. Sometimes for one half moment I forget my dreadful sorrow, and I call out his name; sometimes I wake suddenly, and before I remember he has left me, I begin to wonder where he is."

"It is quite natural, my dear," said Mrs. Gordon; "you will miss him less as time passes."

"Ah, no; I wish almost that it could be so. He was kind to me, so fond of me, and I loved him so dearly. She—that other woman—will never love him half so much."

"My dear Elinore do not mention that woman's name," cried Mrs. Gordon, with sudden viciousness.

"Mother," said Lady Rydal—"it is the first time I have ever called you mother, your kindness has won my heart—I want to ask you a favor."

"Ask what you will, Elinore, I will grant it if I can."

The thin, white hands clung to her.

"You can, if you will mother. Do this for me. Let me drift down the stream. You are caring for me, and nursing me so well, that I shall get well in spite of myself, and I do not wish. Let me drift like a leaf down the stream."

"Let you die, you mean," said Mrs. Gordon, with sudden passion,

"Yes it is the only kindness that you can do for me. My life is all torture. I am always thinking of him, wondering where he is—what he is doing—if he is walking with her, talking to her—whether he is saying the same sweet words to her that he said to me—whether he kisses her as he kissed me. I know he loves her—I know they are together, and I cannot bear the fire of the jealous pain. It burns my very heart away; it is torture to me. See, I beat my hands together until they bled. Poor, chilled little hands, they will never lie in his warm, loving clasp again. I tear my hair to deaden my pain. What matters it that it has lost its beauty and its gloss; he will never caress it again. The greatest kindness you can do to me, is to let me drift like a leaf—let me die."

"Not for his sake," said Mrs. Gordon, with a sudden flush of emotion, "not for his sake, Elinore. If he died, and you had wished to follow him, I should have understood it, for the love between husband and wife is beautiful and holy; but if I can help it you shall not give your life for the man who cast away your love. No; I will help you to get well, to live down your sorrow, and live for your children. I will not help you to die."

But it was with the utmost difficulty that they rescued her from the arms of death. At last she came downstairs again, and began to take up the broken threads of life. Some kindly hand had removed her husband's picture—the handsome debonair face and laughing eyes were gone. Every one was very kind and thoughtful to her and for her, no one intruded on her. Her servants waited upon her in silence and with reverence. Much as her old friends and neighbors desired to call upon her, they kept away, knowing that she had neither strength nor inclination for society. In time she went about her ordinary duties, she gave orders to her household and superintended her children; she managed her affairs; the dignity of a great sorrow, the burden of a heavy shame had become familiar to her. She had outwardly the same life that others had, yet forever and for aye a voice was crying to her heart—

"Oh, love, my love! why have you forsaken me?"

A strange incident happened before the squire and Mrs. Gordon left Dunwold; they had gone out driving one day—Lady Rydal had declined going, and was sitting in the drawing room alone, when Bennet brought in a card on a silver salver.

"The gentleman begs you will see him, my lady," said Bennet.

Lady Rydal took up the card; when she had read it a

great fear and trembling came over her. She rose from her chair with a low cry, she wrung her hands.

"I cannot see him, Bennet!" she cried—"it is impossible!" for the name on the card was that of

THE EARL OF LYNN.

How it happened she never knew, but looking up she saw him standing there before her.

"A thousand pardons," he said "I have travelled far and at some risk to see you. I could not brook a denial. Will you grant me a few minutes?"

"My father is here, will you not see him?" she asked.

"With your permission, madam, no. It is yourself I want to see, and no other, for a few minutes only. I will not distress you—I will not urge it, if you really object; but I have travelled far and have something to say."

"I will hear it," said Lady Rydal, with quiet dignity, and Bennet left them together.

CHAPTER XI.

"You will think it strange, perhaps," said the Earl of Lynn, "that I should have sought you. Your injury is even more cruel than mine."

"We will not speak of it," she said, with trembling hands; "I can never bear to hear it discussed."

"I have no wish to discuss it," said the earl; "it is equally hateful to me. I thought it would be better to see you myself than to write through lawyers, or even to write to you myself. What are your intentions?"

"My intentions?" she repeated blankly. "In what way?"

"You have been cruelly wronged," he said. "Shall you seek compensation?"

"From whom?" she asked. "Who can compensate to me either in heaven or on earth, for what I suffer, for what I have lost?"

"I have used the wrong word, Lady Rydal; I do not mean compensation—there can be none—I mean this: Shall you not do your best to punish them?"

"It would be useless," she said again; "no one could punish such a crime."

"Do you mean, Lady Rydal, that you shall take no steps of any kind, but remain quiescent under the injury you have received?"

"I mean that, Lord Lynn," she replied.

He sat in silence for some minutes.

"After all," he said, "I think your plan will be the greatest punishment of all. I say nothing of the rights or wrongs of divorce—I say nothing of the total subversion of all moral laws, of all notions of honor, of all feeling of delicacy or refinement—I say this, that as the world is constituted, as the degenerate taste of the day dictates, if those two guilty ones are freed by divorce, they could and would marry, and in the course of time, there is little doubt in my mind but that they would be received in society. Everything is forgiven to the young, beautiful, and successful."

"It may be so," she said. She had thought of all that; she had wondered what she should do in the after years if she met him again, or if, when the children grew up, they should meet. "I have thought of that," she said, shrinking as each word spoken laid bare her wound.

"That makes me decide also," continued the earl, "on taking no steps whatever. I might bring an action against him, and claim several thousand pounds' damages, but it would seem to me like blood-money, the price of my wife's honor and my fair name; besides which, if I won the case, as I should be sure to do, she would be free. Another reason is, that I do not care for the scandal and publicity of a trial; my misfortune is widely known, but if it went through the publicity of a hundred newspaper editions, it would be worse still."

She bowed in assent. The earl continued—

"I wanted to know your thoughts on the matter, Lady Rydal, before I made my final arrangements."

"They are the same as your own," she answered. "I shall never take any steps against them of any kind."

"I am glad to hear it," said the earl. "I have decided on my plan of action with regard to the lady who was my wife. I raised her from a lower rank than my own. I trusted my name and my honor in her hands. When we were married, I settled a certain sum upon her; if she chooses to apply to my solicitor for it she can have it. I shall not make the least effort towards giving it to her, seeking her out, or anything of the kind. If ever she does, as I believe she will, come to poverty and distress, she can have it. The woman who has been Countess of Lynn must not suffer want; but under no cir

cumstances will I ever see her or speak to her again. Forgive me, Lady Rydal, if I have intruded on you. I am an old man, I have not long to live, and I wanted to see you. We have both suffered from the same injury. I wanted to look at your face, and see what you were like—to see what the wife was whom he had forsaken to rob me of mine."

She shivered, and shrank at the words as though each one had been a hot lash.

"Now that I have seen you," continued the earl, "permit me, without discourtesy, to express my great surprise. That my wife should desert me is not, perhaps, so wonderful. I am old—stern—past the time of youth or gladness. I was jealous of her—hard and stern with her. She was young—beautiful—the most charming of women, yet to my thinking not more charming or fair than you. I cannot see why he left you for her."

"It matters little why," said Lady Rydal.

The earl drew a letter from his pocket.

"There is one thing to be said about Sir Lionel, he is no coward; he has written to me. Would you like to see the letter?"

"No!" she cried, with shuddering dread, "I would rather not see it."

She could remember when the very sight of that handwriting had made her heart thrill with delight; it would have struck the very sight, from her eyes to have read the words written there.

"He is no coward," continued the earl; "he has written to me from Paris. I will not show you the letter, but I can tell you the contents. He tells me what I know that the hapless, beautiful woman who was my wife has left England with him. The letter, Lady Rydal, was evidently written the day before they left England, for in it he uses the words, 'when you receive this we shall be on our way.' Evidently it was written and sent to me before going.

"He goes on to say that, for the purpose of hearing from me, he shall remain a week or ten days at the Hotel Meurice, Paris, and he leaves everything in my hands. I must say that it is by no means the letter of a happy, successful wooer."

Strange that the lawyer should have said the same thing.

"Sir Lionel offers me what he calls any reparation in his power; he will meet me, if I choose, beyond the frontier—but I am too old for that—he will make no defense against any action I may care to bring; in fact he owns himself guilty;

makes no excuses; admits that he deserves punishment. I did not reply myself, but I told my lawyers to write and say from me that what he had won so lightly he was perfectly welcome to keep; that I should give myself no trouble to recover anything that it was in his power to steal. I expect to hear no more."

"Has she not written?" asked Lady Rydal, in a low voice.

"No, and never will," he said, bitterly; "never while the world stands. I have just one question more to ask you—you will not deem it impertinent because, in this one instance, our interests are identical—what touches you touches me—what affects me affects you. Tell me one thing, Lady Rydal, if your husband came back to you repentant, would you forgive him?"

She was silent some few minutes, then she said—

"Yes, I would forgive him."

"But should you take him back—would you live with him again?"

And again she was silent for some few minutes, during which she thought deeply. Raising her pale, beautiful face to the earl, she answered slowly,—

"No. I think not. Nay I am sure not. I forgive him; I shall love him until I die, but the tie he has broken much be broken always."

"The man must have been mad," muttered the earl, between his teeth. He was surprised at the exeeding beauty of the queenly woman before him; he had been surprised, too, at the beauty of the baronet's home; he could not see what the inducement had been. Vivian was very beautiful, but then, the passing, fanciful love for a beautiful face was surely not enough to induce a man to give up everything in life, even including his own honor, for it. The more the earl thought of it, the more bewildered he was.

"Thank you, Lady Rydal," he said, "for speaking so frankly to me; I think you are very wise. You have more to suffer than I have, from this fact, that you have children and I have none; they will be some comfort when they grow up."

"One has his father's eyes," she said, slowly, "and they pierce my heart. I shall not live to see them grow up."

"Sorrow is long and life is long," said the earl, rising to take his leave. "I thank you Lady Rydal, for having received me; I thank you for the frankness with which you have answered my questions. We may never meet again, but believe me, that no one sympathizes with you more heartily, more

sincerely, than I do, and now that I have seen you my wonder is deepened.

"There is just one thing more that I have not told you," he said; "perhaps there is nothing in it, or it may be important. I met a friend of mine some few days since, Sir Harry Donald, and he had just come from Paris; he had heard nothing of this affair, for he has been travelling in Egypt. He told me that he had met Sir Lionel Rydal at Alexandria."

"At Alexandria?" cried Lady Rydal, and a keen, sudden pain went through her heart; he seemed further away now than ever.

"The strange part of the story is this," continued the earl, "that Sir Harry declares he was alone."

"Alone?" cried Lady Rydal.

"So he said: but of course it must be a mistake. Sir Harry was there three days, and saw him continually, but never once with a lady; and he said that he was quite sure there was no lady staying at the hotel with him."

"How strange!" cried Lady Rydal. "He must have been mistaken."

"So I think; but I thought it better to tell you. And now good-by, Lady Rydal."

And the next minute he was gone, leaving her with her heart beating and every pulse thrilling. The blow had fallen on her in June, when the roses were blooming and the lilies in flower; the roses were still there, and the tiger lilies had taken the place of the white ones. It was not so many weeks since. Could it be possible that they had quarrelled and parted already?

Woman-like, she could not help contrasting her handsome, young husband with the grim, stern old lord. In spite of all that had happened, she was so thoroughly a woman that she could not repress a feeling of pride in that grand, manly beauty which had once been all her own.

Had they parted, or was it a mistake of Sir Harry's? Surely, after all that they had given up, each of them, they could not have tired already of each other!

She was still wondering, when the squire and his wife returned. The first thing Mrs. Gordon saw was the earl's card on the table; she took it up and read it, then cried out,—

"The Earl of Lynn! Oh, Elinore, you do not mean to say that you have seen him?"

"I have, indeed," she replied. "He came soon after you

had gone, and he wished so much to see me—I had not the heart to refuse."

"He has wearied you, I am sure," said Mrs. Gordon.

"No; I am glad I saw him, mother; it has done me good. I thought mine was the greatest trouble in the world—I find there are others almost as great."

"To be sure," said the squire, heartily. "We shall soon have you all right again, Elinore."

His wife turned upon him a withering glance.

"You had better wait and see if the interview has done her good or harm before you pronounce any opinion."

But Lady Rydal went up to her father, and laid her hand on his arm.

"Papa," she said, slowly, "there is a rumor that Sir Lionel is at Alexandria, and that he is there alone!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE story of Vivian Countess of Lynn was no common one. She was the daughter of a brave young Englishman who, tired of the ordinary grooves of life, and by force of his own romantic character, deeply interested in the Carlist cause, had gone to join the Carlists in Spain. Arnold Wylton belonged to a good family, and he was possessed of a small fortune; he spent the greater part of it in the cause of the Carlists; he fell in love with a beautiful Spanish girl, an orphan, and against all the cooler dictates of prudence, reason, and common sense, he married her. She loved him with her whole heart, and when she lay on her deathbed she asked to die looking on his face.

She travelled with him during one short, happy year of their married life, and the beautiful Assunta was the admiration of the whole regiment. She was a beautiful girl loving, devoted, passionately fond of her husband, living on his love and his caresses, forgetting all the world but him, and Heaven was merciful to her. She died in her youth and her beauty, before any of her illusions were destroyed; while the delicate bloom of youth, hope, and love still remained. She died the death that seemed the saddest of all, for she died when her little daughter Vivian was born.

There had been a lull in the hostilities that just then tore and rent the unhappy kingdom of Spain, and the regiment to which Captain Wylton attached himself was stationed in a pretty little town called Galenza, a town nestling in the hills of Spain, and there, at Galenza, the little Vivian was born, and the beautiful young mother died—before all her illusions faded, while she still believed the world to be lower Heaven, and men a little lower than angels—thrice happy so to die and never find out the truth, but to take her faith with her to Heaven. She only asked one thing when she came to die, and it was that her eyes, until the last, might look upon his face. She kissed the little child, and whispered, in her faint voice,—

"Tell me by what name you will call her, Arnold, so that when I hear it in Heaven I may know it."

"I shall call her Vivian," he answered; "that was my mother's name," and there was something of sadness in the sound of the name given over a deathbed.

The beautiful young mother did not seem to feel leaving the little one so much, her whole heart was centred in her husband; she drew his handsome head down to her face, and whispered to him,—

"You will not be long, Arnold?"

"No, my darling," he answered, "I will not be long."

Some love is like this, eternal and beautiful.

"You will have no other love?" she said.

"No, no other love, my darling," he answered.

"I shall come for you," she said faintly. "I think I shall go to Heaven, Arnold; I have done no great wrong, and my first prayer in Heaven will be that I may come and take you there. No other love, Arnold."

"No," he replied; and so, wtth her eyes lingering on his face, and her head on his breast, she died.

That very night, while his beautiful young wife lay dead, and the little babe wailed the loss of the mother it was never to see, that very same night, soon after the sun had set, there was a terrible encounter between the hostile armies, the regiment stationed at Galenza was suddenly sent to the assistance of their comrades, and they were literally cut to pieces. Almost the first to fall was the brave young English volunteer, Captain Wylton,—perhaps he was the most reckless and cared the least for his life,—so that he was soon with Assunta again.

Amongst the other English volunteers serving in the Carlist army was a Major Lester, a friend of Captain Wylton's

although a much older man. Major Lester was a man of some wealth; he was master of a pretty little estate, called Saxton, in Lancashire, but his tastes were all for a roving life. He did not like or enjoy the English fashion of living,—he did not like farming—he did not like country life, the pretty little estate hung heavily on his hands, and at last he persuaded his wife to let him go over to Spain and take his part in the wars. Why he could not rest in his own land, and enjoy his life as other people did, was a wonder and a mystery to his wife. She thought nothing more delightful than a nice country house with a comfortable carriage, and a few nice neighbors,—occasional dinner parties and balls, with a sprinkle of fancy fairs and bazars. To the major it was living death; he longed for travel, for adventure. Sensible friends advised Mrs. Lester to let him go. "A brush with the Carlists" would not hurt him, Perhaps after a year or two of adventure he would appreciate the comforts of home.

The same sensible friends advised her that before he went it would be as well that he should make his will, and settle all his worldly affairs, for the chances were ten to one that he would never return.

He complied with every wish, and left the whole property, together with all he had in the world, to his wife Jane Lester.

"And if I die, my dear," he added, naively, "it will serve me right; it will be my own fault for going."

"It is indeed a thousand pities," said his wife, quietly, "that you cannot be happy at home."

"I was born a rover," sighed the major.

"You should have married a rover," said his wife.

"Nay, my dear, I could never have married any one but you," said the major, whose heart really warmed with affection for the woman who was giving him leave of absence for so long. "You will see, Jennie, when I do return, I shall be domesticated, and quite fond of home; but I must go for a time," he added, piteously. "I feel like a bird that has been for years shut up in a cage and longs to stretch its wings."

"You cannot do better than stretch yours, major, but remember the fate that often overtakes a bird on its wing."

The major did not always quite follow his quick-witted wife —he understood this.

"You mean," he said, "that I might perhaps be shot. If I am, it will be my own fault; I am going to please myself and no one else."

The major fought through many a hot day amongst the

hills of Spain, but no stray shot ever reached him. The first and best friend he made was Captain Wylton. It was strange that two such brilliant and brave Englishmen should have chosen to fight in a foreign cause. One was led there by the very love of the cause, the other by his wild love of adventure. Major Lester loved the life. When he was out campaigning on the warm Spanish hills, where lances bristled and cannon roared, he was a thousand times happier than when in the luxurious safety of his own house. He stretched his wings to the very utmost now that he had a chance. He was first in every danger; he was loved by his comrades; he knew no fear; he was kind as he was brave; and it so happened that when Captain Wylton was struck down Major Lester was by his side. The major caught his comrade just as he was falling from his horse.

"Lay me down to die," he groaned. "Oh, Heaven! major, the shot is red-hot, and is tearing me!"

The major laid him down on the short, sunburnt grass.

"If ever you see Don Carlos," he said, faintly, "tell him how gladly an Englishman died in his cause." He held out his hands to the major. "Dear old friend and comrade," he said, "my wife died this morning, and left me a little child. Will you take her to be your own?"

"So help me Heaven, I will!" replied the good major. "I have no children; she shall be to me as a child of my own."

Then he was sorely puzzled, for a great light came over the dying man's face, and he held out his arms with a cry of rapture. He seemed to forget the red-hot pain of the tearing shot.

"Assunta!" he cried, and died with the word on his lips.

There was no time then, for the foe was in hot pursuit; but on the morrow the major recovered his comrade's body. Husband and wife were buried together in the cemetery at Galenza, and the major erected a monument which told how they both died. He was amazed, awed, and helpless when he saw the little dark-eyed babe, so like its beautiful mother; and the tears stood in the eyes of the good, brave man when he saw the tiny child so utterly alone in the world.

He took it in his great strong arms, and tenderly kissed the little cheeks. It is is only a big brave man who could have been so gentle with a little baby.

"You shall be all my own," he said, "and I will take care of you as long as I live."

How many of the acts of mercy the good major did! He buried the fair young mother and her brave young husband; he had the little one baptized, and hearing from the nurse that it was to be called Vivian, he would have no other name.

But what was he, a major—a man who cared only for adventure and fighting, to do with a delicate babe only a few days old. He sought advice amongst his friends, the result of which was that he decided on taking a little house in Galenza, and leaving the nurse there with the child until he was ready to return. It would have been wiser, perhaps, had he sent the nurse and child home to his wife then and there; that did not occur to him. He lost no time in making his arrangements; he installed the nurse in a pretty little house, made arrangements that she should receive every week a stated sum of money, made elaborate preparations for writing a very long letter to his wife; but before it was even began he was away over the hills again. Many a long month passed before that campaign was over; it was the hottest and hardest of the major's life. He lived every moment of it; he enjoyed the hardships, the perils, the miseries, and dangers as other men enjoy the comforts of home.

It is almost to be feared that he would never have found courage to have left his favorite method of life, but that at last he was wounded. At first the doctors feared the wound was mortal, but after a time it was found that his life could be saved by the amputation of his left arm.

The major heard the news in grim silence. It was all over with him. His wife's words had come true, he had been shot whilst on the wing. He saw his future, he would have to go home and live at Saxton—no more wanderings, no more travels, no more starlit nights on the Spanish hills, no more camping out, no wild adventures, no perils such as made his heart beat and his pulse thrill—no more.

He was none the less brave that the tears came to his eyes and a bitter sob came to his lips. It was all over—the glory, the freshness, the vigor of life had gone from the major; he must go home now, be nursed, tended, cared for. Many long weeks must pass before he could walk without help. He said to the doctors with a smile,—

"My friend and comrade, Arnold Wylton, gave his life for Don Carlos; I must not grudge him an arm."

And he did not, but the brave major found there are trials before which the amputation of an arm sink into insignificance

CHAPTER XIII.

THERE are some situations in life that are at once comical and terrible; the two elements of tragedy and comedy follow swiftly on each other. The long letter to the major's wife had never been written. Mrs. Lester was in perfect ignorance of the whole affair. In the excitement of that long campaign he forgot all about it. He dashed off occasional notes to his wife, telling her where he was, but he never found time to speak of the little Vivian.

"I will tell her when I see her," he thought; "it will be easier than writing; I can make her understand better."

It seemed very easy in the perspective, and the good major did not see either the tragedy or the comedy of the situation.

The nurse with whom he had placed the little Vivian was an Irish widow. She had lost her husband in the Spanish war many years ago, and had lived so long in Spain that she had lost her accent, and spoke the most wonderful mixture of Irish, Spanish, and English ever known. She loved the little one with the warm, true, passionate devotion that the Irish give to the object of their love; she would have given her life for it. The good major travelled with the child and the nurse through Spain, and as he saw nothing unusual in the affair himself, he did not perceive the surprise, the amazement, the amusement of others. The beautiful little child, nearly two years old now, with her magnificent black eyes, was simply worshipped by every one who saw her, and the major was well pleased when he heard her praised.

It was not until he had reached Shelton and saw the astonished faces of the servants, who had come to meet him, that the major felt in the least disturbed. Shelton was the nearest railway station to Saxton, and he was well known there. Great astonishment was shown by every one. His wife had sent the carriage to meet him.

The old coachman, John Tibbets, had been with the major since he was a boy; Peter Hartwell, the footman, had been two years in his service before he went away to Spain. They both remembered his going—they had driven him to the station—and to see him returned in such strange company was almost too much for them. It was the wide open mouths

and the wide open eyes of the two men that first disturbed the major.

"Glad to see you, Tibbets, and you, Hartwell; hope all is well at home. What *are* you looking at?"

"Is this person, major, and this infant to go in the carriage?" asked John, in stately accents.

"Most decidedly," replied the major, briskly—"decidedly, John. This is my adopted child."

"Oh, indeed," replied, John in a tone of voice which seemed to say, "I wash my hands of it," while the good major, said to himself, that surely there can be nothing strange in adopting a child.

"John, how is Mrs Lester?"

"Very well, sir," replied John, who stood in holy and wholesome dread of his mistress, and John said no more.

Still the "situation" did not strike the major as being at all peculiar. Why should it? The little Vivian cooed with pleasure; to her little eyes and baby senses the cool green lanes, shaded by great spreading trees, were beautiful indeed; she stretched her hands to the golden buttercups, she laughed in delight at the pretty brooklets. She was altogether charming, and the major was delighted with her pretty, charming baby ways, regretting, as he looked at her, that neither father nor mother were here to rejoice in her loveliness, and thinking to himself, with a stir of keen pleasure and love at his heart, "she is all mine, Heaven bless her, all mine."

Every now and then he stooped to kiss her, and then it was worth something to see the faces of coachman and groom.

Home at last. There were the grand old chestnut trees, there was the bridge over the beautiful river, there were the tall green towers of Saxton. After all, home was home, and the major's eyes were wet with tears when the carriage stopped at the fine old porch.

His wife was just inside. She would not give and receive her rapturous greeting before John and Peter and any other servant who might be about; she waited until the major came in, then, before he knew exactly where he was or what he was doing, two loving arms were round his neck, and two loving lips kissed his face.

"Welcome home!" she said; "major, you must not leave me again."

Then—for she was a tender-hearted woman—Mrs. Lester bent down and kissed the hanging sleeve.

"My poor darling!" she said. "And I was not there to nurse you."

The major was quite overcome; be kissed his wife with fervent affection, when suddenly she caught sight of the Irish nurse, with the beautiful child in her arms. She stood silent and bewildered for one minute; then she said, calmly,—

"Who is this, major?"

A simple question, but it sent the major's thoughts back to that defile on the Spanish hills where his brave comrade fell; he heard the voice again—"Dear old friend and comrade, my wife died this morning, and left me a little child; will you take her and make her your own?" His thoughts went back to the beautiful young mother, dead in the spring tide of her youth —to the white marble cross in the cemetery at Galenza—and he was silent for a few seconds.

"Who is this, major?" asked his wife again; and in the clear voice there was this time a vibration

The major took the child from the murse, and tried to place it in his wife's arms; but they did not open to receive it, nor did any smile come to her lips.

"We have no children, Jennie," he said, "and I have adopted this."

"*You* have adopted it!" said Mrs. Lester—"it does not follow that I should do the same."

"It does, my dear—it follows as naturally as the day follows night," said the major, genially. "I could not do anything which you would not like, and approve. I love the child, Jennie, you must do the same."

But no softening came into the comely face of Jennie Lester.

"You have not told me whose child it is," she said, coldly.

Alas! for the brave, handsome young comrade who had died in his arms with that cry of rapture on his lips. The Irish nurse stood with lowering brows and fast rising anger; this was not how she had expected to see her cherished child received.

"A proud, cold-hearted English madam, who has no kindness in her," she thought to herself, and never a cordial word passed between them.

The little Vivian stretched out her hands, but Mrs. Lester made no sign of having seen it. She repeated,—the vibration still stronger in her voice.

"Whose child is it, and why have you adopted it, major?"

"She is the daughter of Captain Arnold Wylton, who died

in my arms at the battle of Galenza," he replied. " His wife died in the morning when this little child was born ; he died at night,—he was shot,—and in dying he gave this child to me, and I promised that it should be as my own."

She was silent for a few minutes, then she asked a very natural question,—

" Why did you not write, and tell me about it ? ,'

But when he came to make his excuses, even to his own ears they sounded very poor ones.

" As a matter of courtesy," said Mrs. Lester, " a man consults his wife even before he brings a strange visitor,—much more so when he brings a new inmate."

" My dear," said the major, simplv, " I thought your heart and mine were one ; have you no room in yours for my dead friend's child ? "

" I am afraid not," she said you have taken me by surprise ; you should have given me some little warning. I cannot give my love so suddenly. You know," she continued slowly, " that it has always been a great trouble to me having no children of my own ; you should have warned me."

" Oh, sir oh, major !" cried the Irish nurse, " let me take the baby away ; this lady will never love her. Let me take her away. You shall never need to pay a shilling for her, sir ! I will work for her myself, and keep her, and bless Heaven for the chance ; Sir, mark my words. who turns this beautiful, motherless child away sends away an angel in disguise ! "

" Who is this person ? " asked Mrs. Lester.

" I am not a person, madam," cried Nora " I am the child's nurse."

" Who is she major ? " asked Mrs. Lester, quite ignoring the woman herself.

"She is what she says. my dear, the child's nurse," he replied. " Jennie, I hope you have some dinner ready for us." and with these words he went through the porch. His wife followed him without speaking one word to child or nurse.

" Nora," said the major, " you had better take the little one into the housekeeper's room until Mrs. Lester has time to manage about it."

" I wish I could take you to Heaven, my darling," cried the nurse, as she kissed with passionate affection the beautiful face of the child.

Then the housekeeper came, and if there had been any want of warmth in the greeting from the drawing-room it was atoned for here ; the whole household were literally on their

knees before the child, while Nora, whose very heart was singing for joy at these sweet praises of her child—Nora, with all her native eloquence, recounted her history.

How her mother died—in the morning when she was born—died looking on her husband's face: how her father was slain at night, and died in the major's arms; how the good major had promised to take care of the child as though it were his own. So eloquently did Nora tell her story that the maids were all in tears. They crowded round the beautiful little child, who displayed all her airs for their benefit, and won her little way into each heart present.

While Mrs. Lester followed her lord and master into the drawing room.

"How beautiful home looks, Jennie," he said. "And you my darling, you look young and fair, but you have disappointed me just a little about the child. Why can you not love it, Jennie?"

She made no answer, but her head drooped.

"If you had seen her father die—if you had seen her mother dead, Jennie, you would love her."

Then she looked up at him with tears in her eyes.

"Do you not understand?" she cried. "Can you not see that I am just a little bit jealous? I have no children, and you bring this strange child into the house and ask me to love her. Ah, how little men understand!"

"I think I understand now, my dear," said the major gently. "You must be my first thought. Shall Nora take the child away?"

"No," she replied, slowly. "You have adopted her. I will try to do my best for her."

"Will you try to love her?" asked the major.

"I will try," she replied, "but I am not sure."

That was concession enough for the major.

"You will succeed, my dear," he said.

But Mrs. Lester never did succeed, and to that fact was owing, perhaps, all that went wrong in the life of the girl who afterwards became Vivian, Countess of Lynn.

Mrs. Lester tolerated her, treated her kindly, but never loved her, and she was one of those who could no more live without love than a flower can live without sunshine, and the love never came until it was too late.

CHAPTER XIV.

In the years to come it was always the same story. Mrs Lester "did her duty"—a favorite phrase with some women—to the child; but she never liked her, never thoroughly loved her, while she soon became the very light of the major's life. It is only needful of those childish years to relate those details which show how her character was formed. Her chief characteristic—and she inherited it from her mother—was a passionately loving heart. She could be led by love more easily than any creature living but by nothing else. She adored the Irish nurse Nora, with all the wild impetuosity of her heart, and she loved the major in the same eager impassioned way.

If either of them spoke she obeyed in one moment, because she loved them. If Mrs. Lester issued any commands she disobeyed them, because she did not love her. A subtle, silent warfare was always going on between this lady and the child. Mrs. Lester was jealous of her, jealous because she had no children of her own; and it seemed terrible to her that the child of a stranger should make the centre of her home. She was jealous also over the great love that the major bore the beautiful child, so that, in one fashion, while all good was cherished, evil was fostered in the child's heart. She enjoyed her little triumphs over Mrs. Lester, and there were many; the whole day was a struggle between them. Vivian was indulged by the major and by Nora, Mrs. Lester kept some kind of rule over her.

She was a wonderful child, so beautiful, so graceful, so full of life, of animation and vivacity. A child for whose future any thoughtful person might have trembled unless she were shielded by the great buckler of a safe and happy love. Her face was perfect in its dark southern loveliness. Her dark, waving hair and magnificent eyes were quite a contrast to the fair loveliness of English girls. She had a voice that was silver sweet, perhaps the greatest of her many gifts. A voice, every vibration of which was sweet and clear, full of music and passion. The major was wont to declare that it was sweeter than the voice of a cooing dove, and that some day it would wile the heart of some brave young fellow out of his breast. She had a

most delicious dimple in one corner of her lip, and another in the midst of the whitest and most faultless chin that ever graced a human face. The major delighted in these dimples.

"You will see," he would cry, with exultation. "You will see what damage those dimples will do."

"If I could persuade you major, not to fill that child's head with such pitiful nonsense," his wife would cry. "Vanity and anticipation of conquest make but poor training for a child."

"She will be all right," the major would say. "Let her alone, Jennie—let her alone. Dimples and dark rings of curls—they are like tendrils of a grapevine, are they not?—are a fine fortune for any girl. Let her alone, Jennie."

He delighted in the child's beauty, he luxuriated in her bright, glorious loveliness. The best part of the major's life was over; he had to live now on memory; he could dream over and over again of his past acts and deeds of valor, of the grand struggles on the Spanish hills, and in the deep ravines, where a man lost his life lightly. Never more could he go out, gun in hand, with his pointers, treading the dew from the grass and shaking it from the leaves; never again could he mount his good steed and follow the hounds with a cherry ho-ho for a cloudy morning—never again. His pipe his newspaper, the management of his estate, the conversation of his wife, the beauty, charm, and grace of the child were now his sole companions.

It was with a sigh that he sat down in his easy chair and took up his paper—no one ever heard the brave man murmur or complain—and Vivian was his greatest resource; there was something marvellous and beautiful in the way in which she waited upon him. The major never missed his left arm when she was near; she did everything for him, filled his pipe, cut his papers, turned them for him, mixed his claret cup as no one else could do it, sat by him watching his face as a mother watches the face of her child, anticipated all his wants, never forgot one single thing he asked for.

The good major, who could never by any means be brought to understand the motives of women, would say to his wife;

"I do not know, Jennie, what I should do without that child. In this instance most certainly virtue is its own reward. I do not know what I should do without her."

"You would always have me," said his wife, in a tone of reproach.

"Ah, yes; but that is a different matter altogether. I—I

wish sometimes," sighed the major, "that we had a daughter of our own."

"So do I," sighed Mrs. Lester.

"We must be content with Vivian," he said, with a smile; but the words found no echo in his wife's face or in her heart.

So as the child grew older, and her wonderful beauty deepened, and the major became more and more hopelessly her slave, the jealous dislike of his wife for his adopted child increased.

It was characteristic of her wonderful instinct that no matter how much Mrs. Lester annoyed her, Vivian never said one word to the major. She seemed to understand, with the wondrous intuition given to some children, that Mrs. Lester had all the right and claim to the first place; she understood that she was the adopted child of the house. If Mrs. Lester was unusually hard or severe, she would run out to the major. "Tell me about my beautiful mother in Spain," she would say; and the major, always obedient to her least word, wish, or desire, would begin at once, and tell her all he remembered of the beautiful Assunta who died looking at her husband's face. Then he would tell her of the brave, handsome young hero who had given his life for Don Carlos. The girl's noble, impassioned nature was roused by these stories; she wept passionate tears, her face would flush, her heart beat quickly.

"I must be a great heroine, major," she would say, "my father was a hero."

"The greatest heroine is the one who does quietly and dutifully the work God gives her to do," he would answer.

The quick, fervid, impetuous, impassioned nature of the child at times almost frightened him.

"Then the work given to me just at present is to love and serve you," she would say, "and I mean to do it well."

Again she would say, "Did my father really die in your arms, major?"

"He did, my dear with his head on my breast."

"Show me just the place where his head lay, major."

Then when he indicated it, she would cover it with kisses and tears and Mrs. Lester could not endure that.

"Vivian is growing too old to kiss you in that absurd fashion, major," she would say sharply.

"My dear, the child is but a child; do not be jealous of her. She kisses my breast because her father died there; she kisses my hands because they have shielded her; she kisses me because she loves me."

"It is just a little strange that with so much enthusiastic gratitude she never offers to kiss me," said Mrs. Lester.

"My dear Jennie, *you do not love her*, and although you never say so, the child's quick instinct tells her so."

She was the sunshine of the major's life—of the whole household. Every man, woman, or child who looked upon her loved her, except Mrs. Lester. Vivian received a splendid education; for some things she had a natural aptitude that was wonderful; for music she had something like genius; she sang like a nightingale—her voice soft, sweet, and clear, yet vibrating with the wonderful passion that was in her.

The major was an excellent linguist, and he taught her French and German—they seldom spoke English, while a governess from Saxton grounded her in the rudiments.

She grew up beautiful, stately, and graceful as a young palm tree, full of grace, charm, and witchery, and in her seventeenth year there was not in all England a more beautiful girl than Vivian Wylton. In the pictures of the old masters a face like hers peeps out, a wonder of beauty and color; clear, starry eyes, bright as diamonds, soft as velvet, full of passion, yet languid at times, with sweetest thought; lashes thick and fine like fringe; straight dark brows that would have made a plain face beautiful. She had the brow of an empress, imperial in its low, broad loveliness; a mouth like a cloven rose; a complexion that resembled nothing so much as the daintiest peach blossom; hers was the wondrous southern beauty, like light gleaming on dark waters.

The major looked at her at times and sighed. He knew just enough of life to understand that beauty was a grand but fatal dower. He saw his adopted child was lovely, graceful, and accomplished enough to fill any position in life, no matter how exalted it might be. He wanted her to be happy, and he talked to her for hours together, trying to instill lessons of prudence into her mind, but if he had been more observant he would have seen in that restless, beautiful, passionate face the shadow of a coming story.

Vivian was happy in a careless, picturesque fashion of her own. She read a great deal; she spent long hours over her music; she lived in the clear, sweet, wholesome atmosphere of an English home, clear and sweet; both physically and morally she did not know evil; she had hardly heard of sin; she understood little of sorrow or sickness; she was like some fair rose that had grown under the shelter of wood green leaves.

There was a danger that even the good major never foresaw,

and it was the danger arising from the loving, passionate nature that had as yet found no outlet. The terrible power of concentration in love is not given to every one happily; it had been given to her with a fervor that made it dangerous. With all that power of love, with all the sublimity of passion, she had no one but the major and her old nurse to love.

It was love that would be her doom. She might have prayed, this beautiful young creature, that Heaven, in its mercy and goodness, would give her a good love, and a safe love, for the safety and welfare of her whole life depended on it. Beautiful, visionary, full of sweet thoughts, of wondrous powers, gifted with the finest imagination, full of poetry and romance, with all the innate force of passion belonging to such highly strung and highly sensitive natures as hers, she wanted the care of the most tender of mothers, and she was left alone.

Sixteen, young, beautiful, sweet, powerful, a woman yet a child, a queen yet humble with those she loved; full of romance and ideality, full of all the sweet dreams and vague, beautiful hopes of youth; she was something to love, something to worship. She was just seventeen when the Earl of Lynn fell in love with her, and resolved, if he could win her, to make her his wife.

She would not have married him but that the major died suddenly; her old and faithful friend the Irish nurse was married, and she was alone in the world. No one influenced or persuaded her. She was a little more than seventeen when she became the Countess of Lynn, the youngest, fairest countess in the realm.

CHAPTER XV.

The Earl of Lynn was more than sixty years old when he saw the beautiful young Vivian, a wealthy, stately old man, who had spent his life in the indulgence of all his whims and fancies, and now, as a last resource, he had fixed his heart on securing the most beautiful young girl in England as his wife.

Lord Lynn met the major and his beautiful young ward at a grand ball given at Shelton in aid of some county charity. The town of Shelton lay between the major's estate of Saxton and the grand estates of the Earl of Lynn, called Lynn Royal, a place famous in its way, but that way does not concern our story.

The Earl of Lynn, as the first nobleman in the county, and a munificent subscriber to the charity in question, was of course, the patron of the ball. At the age of sixty a man, as a rule, is not much elated at the prospect of a ball; the earl most heartily detested the idea of this. A ball in London, where the loveliest women of the day gave him their brightest smiles, was bad enough, but in the town hall of Shelton, with nothing but provincial beauties, it would be horrible.

However, rank has its duties as well as its pleasures, and the earl knew that he must go, suffer what he would. He went, bored to death, inclined to be cross with everything and every one. He relieved his mind by swearing at the coachman and driving his valet almost wild, then he felt better; he knew that he must be the very pink of courtesy in the ballroom, and it was a relief to get rid of some little irritability on the way.

There was a great sensation when the earl entered the ballroom; there was greater still half an hour afterwards, when the major with Mrs. Lester and Vivian came in. The major looked just what he was—a frank, brave, manly officer; Mrs. Lester looked wonderfully well in a rich dress of velvet and point lace; but before that superb young beauty, Vivian, the hearts of all men went down, Tall, slender, shapely, she was like some young goddess; the dress of white lace, with its crimson roses, might have been a celestial garment. All eyes were levelled on her; her dark, southern, imperial beauty made a sensation. No one admired her more than the earl.

He said to himself.—"That is the loveliest girl I have ever seen in my life, and I will marry her, if I can."

His eyes never wearied of watching the wondrous southern face, with its quick changes of expression, its eloquence and poetry. "The girl herself is a poem," he said, and he devoted himself to her.

An earl *is* an earl everywhere, but in a small county town an earl is a king. Vivian, who at first made a furore by her beauty, at once became queen of of the room when it was seen that the earl so distinguished her; and the poor, beautiful child, only seventeen, knowing nothing of life, flattered by the devotion of so distinguished a man, did not think what she was doing in willingly permitting his attentions.

The Earl rode over to Saxton the next day; he began a course of wooing so fervent, so chivalrous, that it was almost irresistible. He was a good-looking, well-preserved man, quite

attractive enough, even at that age, in his stately dignity, for any girl to admire.

The earl invited the major, his wife, and Vivian to Lynn Royal, and there the girl's brain was intoxicated by praises of her beauty; her senses were intoxicated by the magnificence and luxury that surrounded her; and then he asked her to be his wife.

In one sense it was cruel—it was giving her no choice—she had seen nothing of life, of love, of the world—she was as inexperienced as the least child.

In spite of the glamour that his wealth and his title cast over her—though he was lord of Lynn Royal in Lancashire, of Argos Hall in the Isle of Wight, of Glencairn in Scotland, and of a superb mansion called Glencairn House in town—in spite of that she would not have married him if it had not been for the sudden death of the major. How or why he died so suddenly, no one knew. They left him one bright sunny morning asleep in his garden-chair; when they went back to him he was dead—the brave, true, manly spirit had gone home.

It is useless to dwell on the passionate grief of his wife and his adopted daughter; in this they agreed, it was impossible to tell which grieved for him most.

But when the first keen sense of loss and desolation was over, the old feeling rose in Mrs. Lester's mind that the beautiful girl was but an interloper and an intruder. It was when Vivian first began to realize this that the earl came again with his eager wooing, and she consented to marry him.

Mrs. Lester did and said all she could do to persuade her; she even went so far as to flatter her, and tell her she would be the youngest and the most beautiful countess in England, and Vivian thought the words had a most pleasant sound.

So she went to her doom; in the glamor of his wealth and title she forgot in some measure her beautiful dreams and fancies of love; then Mrs. Lester gave her but little time to think; she kept her mind continually occupied with great dreams of the future, and the girl hardly realized what she was doing until she stood before the altar with the Earl of Lynn. Then, looking at him, she thought of her young mother who had died so many years ago in Spain, and who had asked to look on her husband's face while she died.

"Shall I ever make that prayer?" the beautiful young bride asked herself, with a shudder. The answer she found was "no." It was too late to draw back then; and in the

whirl of gayety and festivities that followed her marriage, she forgot much.

Behold her at eighteen—the most popular, the most beautiful queen of the season. The earl was very proud of her; he refused her nothing. She had the finest jewels in London; she had the finest horses; the most luxurious carriages, She wore the richest dresses, and she gave the finest balls in Belgravia. The whole fashionable world raved about her. The Countess of Lynn, her new and wonderful beauty, her eloquence, her wit, her grace, her magnificent voice and perfect singing was on every one's lips. She was undisputably queen of the season; but when it was over—when all the homage and adulation, the praise and flattery lavished on her came to an end—she found she was no happier. The Countess of Lynn had been queen of the fashionable world for three long months, but her heart was not at rest.

Invitations to the country houses and to the continent were lavished upon her. The earl did not care to accept any; he wanted to go to Lynn Royal. She could have as many visitors as she liked there, he said.

The restless, disappointed heart sought its solace in a continual stream of gayety, but did not find it. She knew by this time that she had missed something in life which fell to the lot of others. She was beginning to think that which she had missed was far better than that which she had found.

The earl was as kind as could be, he lavished everything upon her, he let her have her own way in everything; but he was quite old enough to be her father, and she was beginning to see the difference between marrying for love and marrying for money. She was innocent and pure of heart as a child, but she could not help seeing the great difference between the grim old earl and the handsome young men who surrounded her. It was pleasant to see a young face smiling into hers, to see young eyes shine with love and admiration, to feel the support of a strong arm, to hear the sound of young voices—youth loves youth. Still in thought, heart, word and deed she was as true as steel to her husband. She went back to Lynn Royal, and there, to quote the words of the "Shelton Courier," the earl entertained a select circle at his magnificent mansion.

Balls, parties, picnies, every variety of gayety and pleasure was tried by the young countess; to please her the earl had one of the largest rooms in the house fitted up as a theatre—she was fond of private theatricals; and, in spite of all, she grew weary; there were times when she would have given all her splendor

and magnificence for one hour with the major; the desire of her heart was some one to love. If she could have thrown her arms round the major's neck, have kissed the place where her father's dying head had lain, kissed the hands that had shielded and cherished her, she would have been quite happy.

Hers was one of those natures that must love and must cling to something, and she had nothing to love; her loving, caressing nature must have something on which to lavish its warmth and depth. If she had a child it would have been different; she could have poured out the treasure of her love upon it. There was no question of loving the old earl; he had asked her to marry him but there was never anything said about love. He would have looked astonished if she had gone up to him and kissed him. Once when he had presented her with a parure of diamonds fit for a queen, in the enthusiasm of her gratitude she had thrown her arms round his neck and kissed him fervently. The earl, who was "made up" far more than any woman, found himself wonderfully embarrassed by this sudden, earnest caress.

"It is not necessary, my dear," he said, "to make such a demonstrative display of feeling. Of course, under the circumstances, I excuse it; but it would be as well not to repeat it."

Was it wonderful that she never kissed him again? Of course the earl had his weak side. When your figure requires padding, when your teeth are false, when art has assisted nature in the matter of hair, the sudden flinging of even two charming arms round the neck is trying. The countess never kissed her husband again.

There was a wistful look on her face when she saw other wives and husbands together. Amongst their visitors at Lynn Royal were Sir Arthur and Lady Lea. They had not been married a year; they had married for love, and—well, perhaps to sensible and older people they might seem just a little light and foolish, but to the young countess they seemed the most perfectly happy couple in the world—none like them. Lady Lynn found them one morning "measuring love-ribbon," and looked at them in wonder. Sir Arthur looked at her with a smile and a bow.

"It is my fault, Lady Lynn," he said; "I find the sweetest thing in life is kissing my wife."

Lady Lea blushed and smiled, and looked very delighted, while Lady Lynn wondered.

"Do you?" she asked, so naively that they both laughed.

Lady Lynn did not forget that little scene. "It must be

pleasant to be loved in that fashion," she thought. "I—I wish some one loved me."

The contrast between the two husbands occurred to her as she stood there—her own old, cross—requesting that she would not disturb him by any demonstrations—and this one, young, happy, declaring that to him the sweetest thing in all the world was to kiss his wife.

She sighed as she turned away. She had missed something in this life—something akin to her youth and loveliness, and which money could not give her. The beautiful face grew more restless; those dark eyes, which stirred the heart of men with such strange, irrisistible witchery, seemed to be always seeking for something they never found.

So the time passed, and the beautiful spring took the earl and countess from Lynn back to London again.

CHAPTER XVI.

THERE came an evening in April when a grand ball was given by the Duchess of Kene at her magnificent mansion in Hyde Park. A ball that had long been talked about, for it was to be the one of the season. The Duchess of Kene was famous for her ball giving. She had the finest rooms, the most beautiful women, the most eligible men, and the fairest flowers —a great inducement.

The great event of this ball was the coming of the young Countess of Lynn, who, in this her second season, was even more admired than during the first. It was not this year her wonderful beauty, but there was something *chic* about her. She was more animated, more restless, sought more eagerly after society and excitement. She lived, some people said, a whole year in a day. The passionate, powerful nature so long repressed, was beginning to assert itself. There was no one to love, but she must fill her heart; the great void in it was always aching. It must be filled, if not with love, with pleasure, with excitement, with gayety, the praise of men, anything; but it could not remain empty. She did not know or realize that all these things would but make the void greater.

Lady Lynn had never looked more beautiful than on this night when she met her fate. She was beginning to enjoy her

sovereignty over men and the ease with which she made conquests. She was dressed this evening for victory; her dress was of finest black Spanish lace, over magnificent amber brocade, and she wore with it the famous parure of diamonds for which she had paid her husband with a kiss. Nothing so radiant or so beautiful could be imagined out of a dream. The exquisite shoulders and rounded arms gleamed snow-white from under the black lace. The snow-white throat was clasped by a rich necklace of diamonds that were like an imperial crown. She carried a beautiful bouquet of white daphnes with golden hearts.

She was soon surrounded—princes, dukes, great men all struggled for a look, a word, or a smile—the greatest statesmen of the day were delighted to hold her bouquet; still the beautiful restless face seemed looking for something she could not find. Suddenly—she remembers every detail—the band began to play the beautiful "Blue Danube" waltz, and the music seemed to float round the room; suddenly, standing against the velvet hangings of the door, she saw a tall, fair-haired, handsome man, whose face struck her as no other had ever done. She was quite unconscious, poor, beautiful, loving child, that her hour and her doom had come; a handsome man, with a kindly debonair face and laughing blue eyes; frank, clear blue eyes that looked straight at any one, and had nothing to hide; eyes that could give and take a good glance, and saw as much as most people; the very kind of eyes for a man to have if he means to make his way in the world. He had clusters of brown hair, not curls—they often make a handsome man effeminate—but clusters such as one sees in the grand sculptured heads of the ancient gods.

A fine head, towering above the heads of other men, for Sir Lionel Rydal was above the average height; a fine figure, with broad shoulders and a fine chest; he carried himself with a certain manly grace, an easy dignity—there was something about him of sunshine; the word debonair describes him as no other word could do. And the passionate heart of the Spanish girl went out to him, bowed down as it were before him. Of all the men she had met in society not one had attracted her, but at this face she looked again and again. One of the greatest men present went to claim her for the dance promised to him: through it all she looked for that one face. The duke thought her beautiful enough, even more beautiful than she had been described, but she was not animated as they had told him—she said but little. He did not know that

her thoughts were with the handsome face—with the happy, indolent eyes.

The duke relinquished his beautiful partner, and the next one who came to her was Colonel Hunt, generally known as the "Handsome Guardsman." When they paused for a few minutes in the giddy whirl, she looked again for the handsome, debonair face. He, the stranger she did not know, yet whose face was engraven on her heart, was still standing there, looking on with an amused smile.

"Colonel Hunt," asked the queen of the season, "do you see that gentleman standing against the velvet curtains there; do you know who he is?"

"Sir Lionel Rydal," answered the colonel; and it seemed to her in some strange, inexplicable manner the music of the name filled her heart and soul.

"Sir Lionel Rydal, of where?" she asked.

"I am not quite sure; I think the name of his place is Dunwold."

"Where is Dunwold?" she asked.

"I am not sure of that either, but I believe it to be in Kent."

"What is he?" she asked; and the colonel arched his brows in surprise that she should be so deeply interested in a country baronet, and she the queen of the season.

"He is no one very particular," he replied; "a country baronet, not distinguished in any way that I know."

"Is he married?" asked the young countess, and even she herself was hardly aware of the keen interest in her voice.

"Again I should say not. I meet him at the "Junior" and at many other places, but I hear nothing of any Lady Rydal;" then the colonel, thinking he had given quite time enough to any man, began to talk about himself; the subject did not in the least interest the proud young beauty.

Afterwards, when the crisis came, the colonel said that he had always foreseen it, that it was no fault of poor Rydal's, the countess had taken a fancy to him the first moment she saw him; and he related to his most intimate friends the story of how he had vainly tried to interest her in any other conversation, but could not, and when the sensation was at its height, Colonel Hunt became quite a hero, as having been the "first to notice anything wrong."

A silence fell between them; if the queen of the season did not care to interest herself in him personally he was not certainly going to interest her by talking about another man.

Suddenly she looked up at him with those magnificent dark eyes which no man ever resisted.

"Colonel," she said, "will you introduce me to your friend?"

"What friend?" he asked, affecting to ignore their conversation.

"The gentleman whom you called Sir Lionel," she replied, and the sweetness of her voice finished what the beauty of her eyes had begun.

"Certainly; any wish of yours is law to me," he replied.

To quote that gallant officer's own expression, he was the one who fired the cannon, for he introduced the two. He went up to Sir Lionel and touched his arm.

"I have brought you something more valuable than a royal invitation," he said.

Sir Lionel smiled.

"What is it," he said. "I was just thinking of going. All balls are alike; I shall go to no more."

"You will not find this ball like any other," said the colonel, with a smile.

"In what does it differ?" asked Sir Lionel.

"The most beautiful woman in England has asked to be introduced to you," he answered.

Sir Lionel laughed.

"My dear colonel," he replied, "beautiful women are——"

"No treason," cried the colonel. "They are the first objects of a man's chivalrous devotion, to be sure! The queen of the season, the most beautiful woman, I repeat, in all England, has sent me to introduce you to her."

"I am highly flattered," laughed Sir Lionel. "Do you mean the Countess of Lynn? I hear every one talking about her. Some of them seem in a very bad way," and Sir Lionel gave his handsome head a careless toss as though he would say, "I should like to see a thing of that kind happen to me."

"It is a great honor," said the colonel, gravely. "I know many men in this room who would give all they possess for the same grace. She has been asking many questions about you."

"I hope you gave me a good character, colonel?" said Sir Lionel.

"If I had given you a bad one she would hardly have sent for you," replied the handsome guardsman. "I had to flatter an old dowager for half an hour to get my introduction. It

was hardly fair to spend the whole time, as she did, in discussing you."

But Sir Lionel looked supremely indifferent, and the colonel felt a longing to shake the careless indifferent smile from that handsome face.

"You will think more highly of the favor in a short time," he said, dryly.

"I can stand fire," laughed Sir Lionel, but his heart beat and his pulse quickened when he saw that magnificent southern face. A strange sensation came over him, he could not define it; it was not love, it was something that he had never experienced before. She was looking at him with those wondrous eyes of hers.

"How fair and comely he is," she thought, while the colonel murmured a few words of introduction, and Sir Lionel murmured a few perfectly inaudible words. Then the colonel bowed and left them; he had the good sense to see that he was *de trop*.

For some moments the beautiful young queen of the season stood silent. She was for the first time in her life, at a loss what to say.

"Do you like impulsive people?" she asked, suddenly. "I am impulsive. I acted on impulse when I asked the colonel to introduce you to me."

"It was a very charming impulse," he answered, "and a very fortunate one for me."

"But do you like impulsive people?" she asked again.

"I must first consider if I know any," he answered. "I am impulsive myself, and to say that I liked people of impulse would be to say that I liked myself. That is my favorite waltz, 'The Soldaten Lieden,'" he said. "Will you dance it with me?"

And that was how the tragedy began; the angels in Heaven alone knew how it ended.

CHAPTER XVII.

HALF an hour later, and they were still together standing in the cool shade of the grand conservatory, where the sweet ripple of falling waters and the soft fragrance of a thousand flowers made music and beauty.

So great was the glamour that had fallen over her that she could not remember how her dance ended, or how they came there; she knew that he had drawn a chair near to the soft rippling water, and as she took it the perfume of the flowers closed round her—she was in another world,

Suddenly she raised those dark, splendid eyes of hers to his, and he read in them something that he had never seen in any woman's eyes before, and the glance stirred a depth in his heart no one yet had ever reached; strong as he was he hesitated.

"How long," she asked, "had you been standing there at that door?"

He smiled a little at the question, it seemed to him a strange one; he did not know that her whole world and her whole life had changed since her eyes first rested on his face, since she lifted up her eyes and loved him, with that love that was her doom.

"I had not been there very long," he answered, "when you sent for me."

"Do you believe in fate?" she asked him.

"Yes, in some kind of fates," he replied.

She went on, her dark eyes resting on his with an expression that said plainly enough she had found something for which she had long sought.

"I can remember receiving the invitation for this ball; and I said to myself that I would go, for the Duchess of Kene gives the best balls in London. Before I wrote accepting it, another invitation came for the same evening. It was for a *soiree*, and I thought that I should enjoy that best. The simple accident of my answering one letter before the other brought me here. I accepted quite unconsciously the wrong invitation. I declined the *soiree* and accepted the ball. I had intended to do just the other thing. I say that the finger of fate held my hand and pointed my pen."

He was silent, and the ripple of the fragrant water was the only sound they heard.

"When I was starting," "she said, "my maid had persuaded me to wear a suite of pearls—against my wish. I wanted diamonds, but maids are often mistresses. My pearl necklace broke, and all the beautiful gems fell to the ground. My maid is one of the most superstitious of women, and she cried out, 'oh my lady, that means bad luck; do not go to the ball.' I laughed, and said it means that I am to have my own way—bring the diamonds. I had some *gloire de Dijon* roses, and I told her to put one in my hair. Just as she fastened it there the roses fell. I

laughed, for roses must die. My maid cried out again, 'It is bad luck, my lady; do not go to the ball.'

"Just as I came down the staircase my husband met me. At the same time a lamp suddenly lighted threw a dazzling gleam into my diamonds. My husband laughed.

"'You shine like the sun, my lady,' he said. "'The light will bring you good fortune?' Now which do you think the true prophet, my maid or my husband?,'

"I hope your husband," he said; "I should not like to think that there could be any 'ill luck,' as your maid called it, in store for you."

"I believe in fate," said Lady Lynn. "I said to myself as I drove here, that in all probability something would happen at this ball to make it differ from any other."

"Has anything happened!" he asked, and there was a curious tremor in his voice.

"Yes," she said, and the dark eyes drooped as though they were languid with the weight of thought. "Yes I met *you*."

The little fountain rippled on, the odor of the flowers grew sweeter, the music from the ballroom came nearer and nearer. He was a mortal man, and his face flushed hotly at the compliment so deliciously implied. He tried to say it was equal happiness for him to meet her, but the words did not come easily, and the silence was far more eloquent.

The countess dipped the dainty tips of her fingers in the perfumed water,

"People say that women are not philosophers. It is quite a mistake, I myself am a philosopher "*au fond*," and I ask myself if the spirit of fate that has brought me here is a good one or a bad one, cruel or kind; does she hold roses or thorns in her hands, does she smile or weep?"

"You speak," he said, "as though this were really an eventful evening to you."

"And *you!*" she said, with another of those glances no man could resist, a golden gleam in her dark eyes, love laden, with a very passion of tenderness in their depths.

He was at a loss what to say.

"It is no less an event for me," he replied.

"How strange fate is; what dances it leads us. Who can avert or avoid it?"

"There is a Higher Power," said Sir Lionel, gently.

"I know it," she answered; "some people confuse the two. Was it fate or Providence that led me here to-night? I say fate."

"I hope Providence," said Sir Lionel. "We shall see which is right."

He longed to ask her why she was so deeply interested in him. To do Sir Lionel justice, he was not a vain man, and he was devoted to his beautiful wife. He never dreamed that this beautiful young creature had found in him her ideal—found it suddenly and without warning. If he had suspected it, at that stage of the acquaintance, he would have kissed the sweet white hand that lay in the fragrant water, and have left her forever. But he did not. He thought her wonderous beautiful, original, and piquant; there was a witchery and charm about her; but he never thought of love.

There is a witchery in the perfume of flowers, in the ripple of fragrant water, in the faint sound of sweet music, in the cool beautiful light given by the lamps that shine like stars amidst the fair blossoms; a witchery that stole upon them unawares —that woke for the first time the innate passionate love that filled her heart, and for the first time made Sir Lionel forget everything in the world but her beautiful face.

No one ever does wrong all at once; there are steps in wrong doing—true, that to some eager, impetuous natures a sudden temptation comes which, like burning lava, sweeps away all before it; even that seldom happens unless there has been some ground for it. A man seldom commits murder on the hot impulse of the moment; there must have been some dislike, jealousy, hatred, something to clear the way. A man never asks his neighbor's wife to run away with him the first time he meets her; there must be hours of flirtation—there must be hours all too dangerously sweet, that slope the downward path and makes it easy.

So few—alas, so few! have the self-control, the self-restraint to deprive themselves of what seems so attractive—for conscience's sake, and those who love the danger perish in it: but if to either of those two there had come that night the faintest inkling of their danger, they would have parted then and there. The very great evil of all sin is the glamor it throws over the sinner.

The conservatory began to fill, and Sir Lionel asked the countess if she would dance with him, and they went away to the ballroom together.

There came to the young countess a rose-colored mist, a dream of music, of light, and perfume, a handsome face looking down into her own, a strong arm clasping her, a dream of happiness and delight, and there was no one to whisper to her,

no angel to warn her that the path which looked so pleasant, which was covered with roses, led to the very chasm of darkness and despair.

She did not seem to recover herself until she found herself out in the starlight, the carriage waiting for her, and Sir Lionel waiting to help her in.

"Good-night," he said, gently—"good-night, Lady Lynn."

"Are you going to Lady Bury's garden party to-morrow?" she asked.

"Yes," he replied, without the least idea who Lady Bury was, or anything about her garden party, but determined to find out.

"Then I shall see you there," she said. "I like garden parties better than balls; one can do more as one likes," said Lady Lynn, "and Lady Bury makes hers pleasant. Good-night."

He held her hand just one moment longer than was strictly needful; he looked at the beautiful face so exquisitely fair in the faint starlight. Ah, what was the story those sweet, bright eyes told him?

He did not return to the ballroom, his heart was beating, every nerve and pulse seemed to thrill; he tried to shake off the influence, but she had bewitched him. The stars shining in the skies reminded him of her beautiful eyes, and what a face, what splendor of vivid coloring, what faultless features,—the ripe, rich mouth of a goddess. But why had she been so kind to him? She had asked him where he was staying, and he told her his club: that made her certain that he was a bachelor; a married man would have a house of his own.

"Is it not dull," she said, "living at a club?"

He told her "No"—that most men found it very pleasant.

"You must come and see me very often," she said, resolving that when he did so he should have the comfort of a home. "Your place is called Dunwold," she said. "What a pretty name."

But it never entered his mind to tell her that at Dunwold there was a beautiful wife and two fair children—she did not know that until it was too late.

"Sir Lionel Rydal, of Dunwold," she repeated. "I have heard no name that has pleased me better."

"I wish," he said, laughingly, "that I were as fortunate as my name."

"In that respect you are," she answered, earnestly, "for I have met with no one who has pleased me more."

All these pleasant phrases went through his mind when he was alone, and the voice, vibrating with sweetness and with passion, never left his ears.

With Sir Lionel it was more wonder and admiration than anything else; with Lady Lynn it was the first most fatal wakening of the love that was to be her doom.

Sir Lionel went home; and to drive away the vision with shining eyes that followed him, he wrote a long letter home: then he opened a book of poems that lay on the table—one he had been reading some few hours before—and the first words that met his eyes were these; "God make thee good as thou art beautiful, said Arthur, when he dubbed him knight." And the grand words filled his mind with noble thoughts.

That night he lived in an enchanted atmosphere, while Lady Lynn went home to dream.

Alas! that the dream being so sweet should be so sinful. Women have the art of deceiving themselves; but how a woman, knowing that her husband lives, can give herself up to a dream of another face and another voice, is a puzzle! She went home to dream of Sir Lionel.

> "All night long his face before her lived—
> Dark, splendid, sparkling in the silence, full
> Of noble things, and held her from her sleep."

She had never dreamed of a face before; hundreds had passed before her, but none had struck her until this one came.

Alas! that the dreams were so sweet, and the waking hours were sweeter still. She asked herself a hundred times that day was it fate or Providence that sent her to the ball?

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE earl when he sat down to breakfast with his beautiful young countess saw something fresh, something in her face that he had never seen before; he could not tell what it was. something that softened the proud beauty into fairest loveli-

ness, a dewy light in the dark eyes, a faint tremulous smile on the faultless lips; she sat looking with dreamy happy eyes at the rich golden roses that hung together in glorious clusters. She did not see one of them, she saw a handsome face with laughing sunny blue eyes.

"You seem to have pleasant thoughts, Vivian," said the earl.

"Yes," she answered, "I enjoyed the Duchess of Kene's ball."

"I wonder you do not tire of balls," said the earl; "I really detest the word."

"You did not probably at my age," she said hastily, and the earl, who hated to be reminded of his age, frowned.

"Why was it so pleasant, Vivian?" he asked, jealously.

"There were so many pleasant people," she replied.

She had a keen sense of the comic, and she was afraid of laughing aloud when she heard him muttering something about "grinning apes!"

"Who was there?" he asked.

"You will see the list in the papers," she replied. "I did not know one half, and I do not remember one quarter. Luton, are you going to Lady Bury's garden party?"

"Half dead roses, wet strawberries, and earwigs," he muttered. "No, a garden party is a greater bore than a ball."

She looked up pale with alarm, lest he should say that she had better not go either.

"You are given to epigrams, this mornings," she said.

"Is that an epigram? It is a very true one. You can go, Vivian, if you like. You must excuse me; I have not time, and I have less inclination.

A sudden feeling of relief and exhilaration came over her, a sensation of freedom. She wondered why she felt so much like a schoolgirl going out for a holiday.

"I shall enjoy it," she said.

The earl laughed a cold, cynical laugh.

"I may retaliate," he said, "by saying that at your age, one enjoys anything. Do not forget that we have the Duke and Duchess of Ladyswell to dinner to-day."

"I wish I could forget it," sighed the countess.

"Why?" asked the earl, sharply. "Why should you wish to forget a visit from my friends?"

"Because, my dear lord, they are so terribly heavy," she replied. "The duke is *almost* unamusable; the last time he

dined here I had to talk the whole evening to him, and then he did not smile twice."

Since the last grand scene, when she had so fearfully disturbed her husband by kissing him suddenly, she had not ventured often to call him by his somewhat singular Christian name of Luton. She was compelled to humor his peculiar notions, and it was no small trial to this proud young beauty. He was not an amiable man by any means, this stern old earl, nevertheless he was the husband she had married, and she was bound to submit.

It seemed to Vivian, Lady Lynn, that the hours of that day would never pass; the carriage was ordered for four. Florette, the pretty, superstitious Parisian maid, could hardly understand what had come to her young mistress.

"I want," cried the countess, "to look like an angel, Florette."

"Ah, madame, that is impossible. I can dress you in any other fashion," replied the maid.

"I want to look like the prettiest and best dressed woman in London," cried Lady Lynn.

"And that will be most easy, miladi, if you will lend yourself to my taste."

Florette's taste led her to decide on a dress of pale blue silk, with a rich mantle of white lace. A bonnet that looked as though one could blow it away with a breath; dainty, exquisite, and elegant. Lady Lynn looked like a picture. Her face was radiant with happiness. She went into the study to say good-by to the earl. A respectful farewell, without any kissing or nonsense of waste words. Her bright eyes and lovely smiling lips pleased him.

"You look so beautiful," he said, "I should like to go with you."

She was in mortal alarm. If he did so all her anticipations of enjoyment were ended. She would have to walk by his side and talk to his friends. "It serves me right," she thought, as she stood fastening her dainty gloves. "I should not be so amiable. Why need I have come to wish him good-by."

"You have recovered from your fear of earwigs then?" she asked.

"No. Do you know, Vivian, it seems a cowardly thing to say, but all my life I have had a terrible dread of earwigs."

"They are most horrible things," she replied, gravely.

"Some men are afraid of one thing and some of another,"

said the earl. "The only thing I am really afraid of is an earwig. You will think it strange, but I would sooner meet a wild beast than see one of those horrible things."

"It is a great pity," said the countess, demurely, "that all the gardens are so full of them."

"I must have been frightened about them when I was a child," said the earl. "I can remember a nurse who told us the most awful stories about a man who had a nest of earwigs in his brain."

"How awful, how dreadful," said the young beauty, with shining eyes and smiling lips. "Luckily I do not fear them."

"After all, I will not go," said the earl. "I should imagine that I felt them crawling in my ears every moment. I will not go, Vivian."

"What a narrow escape," she thought to herself. "Who says virtue is its own reward! I shall bless the earwigs all the afternoon. Oh, thank Heaven," she added, with a jubilant cry, "the roses are not dead to me."

An hour later she was standing in a perfect bower of roses with Sir Lionel by her side; the sun was shining, the air was all fragrance, the band was playing; in the distance the swift, beautiful river ran, for Lady Bury's villa was on the banks of the Thames.

Sir Lionel had been somewhat puzzled again. The moment the beautiful young countess appeared she was surrounded as usual; one wished to take her on the lake, another to the tenniscourt, another to show her the conservatories. When she saw Sir Lionel a beautiful blush crimsoned her face, her eyes shone with the sweetest of welcomes for him. He noticed, too, that the group of gentlemen fell away from her one by one; they understood better than he did the signs in her face; they were left alone after a time.

The men of the present day are too well educated and too well trained to—what they call in common parlance—"spoil sport;" in fact, the way in which Society smiles and shuts its eyes is one of the wonders of the day. In the dark after days, when the sun ceased shining and the roses were all dead, these very men who had been the first to move from her side and leave her with the man they saw she cared for, were the first also to laugh at the story and make light of her name.

"They had seen it all along, as a matter of course."

They stood amongst the roses. Alas, that the story is so sweet yet so pitifully sad.

"I am glad you have come," said the low, sweet voice.

"Let us turn down this broad path here; I see Lord Lucre coming, and I do not care to talk to him."

She took his arm, and they walked away together until they reached a perfect thicket of roses. The seat must have been placed there by a poet, for those using it could see nothing but roses—they had bloomed so early that year—it was only the middle of May.

Then it seemed to her, poor hapless child, that she drifted into paradise.

"This place reminds me of Moore's poems," said Sir Lionel.

"'There's bower of roses by Bendemeer's stream.'"

She looked up at him with love-laden eyes.

"You must not quote poetry to me," she said. "Talk to me about yourself."

"A very uninteresting subject to me," laughed Sir Lionel; "but since you wish it——"

"I do wish it," she replied. "I should like to know your tastes, your likes, dislikes. I should like to know if you have room in your heart for a little friendship? Do you know—perhaps it is very wrong of me to tell you—but the moment I saw your face I said to myself. 'I should like him for my friend.'"

"Did you?" said Sir Lionel, touched by her sweet and gracious manner. "Did you? How good of you."

He ought to have added, "I must first consult my wife," but it did not occur to him; in fact, just at that moment it is much to be feared that he did not remember her. The sweet voice went on,—

"I suppose you imagine that I am surrounded by friends. I have hundreds of acquaintances, but since the major died I do not believe I have one true friend."

He longed to say, "Your husband ought to be your best friend," but he remembered how very old and decrepit that husband was, how unsuited to this beautiful young creature, and he was silent.

"Every one has a certain feeling of loneliness," she said. "I have, most of all when I am in a crowd. I always wish for some one to know and understand the same things that I know and understand. I have a feeling always that I am quite alone."

"The consequence of an ill-assorted marriage," thought Sir Lionel.

"When I have read of friends, I have always thought that I should like to have one, and the moment I saw you—you will think it strange—but the moment my eyes fell on your face, a strange sensation came over me; it was as though a voice, speaking right in my own heart, cried, 'This is what you have sought.' It was strange, was it not?"

He looked at her in wonder.

"It was more than strange," she continued. "Do you think—you remember how we talked about fate and Providence; do you think it was fate or Providence—that—that brought us together?"

"I think—I hope it was Providence," he replied; "as I told you once before, I do not believe in fate."

"I accept it then," she said with earnest gravity. "It was Providence; have you ever heard of any one being attracted in that way by the face of a stranger?"

"No," he replied, "except——" he was about to add, "except when one falls in love with another," but he checked himself in time.

"Except what, Sir Lionel?" she asked.

"There are some natures which have a special attraction for each other," he said, "and I believe that is recognized at once."

"Then I at once recognized you" she questioned.

He looked at her in surprise, this beautiful woman whom yesterday he had not known but who interested him so greatly.

"It must have been so," he replied.

Her beautiful face lighted up with pleasure; her dark eyes softened with a mist of happy tears.

"I am so glad," she said, simply. "And you have room in your life for such a friendship?"

He was about to tell her what ties he had—wife, children—but she interrupted him suddenly, and the impulse to speak of his wife died, and never returned; when it came again, it was all too late—her beauty, her grace, the tenderness of her voice and manner, the witching light of her dark, eloquent eyes carried him out of himself: he forgot everything except the beautiful woman before him?

"Room in my life!" he cried. "What greater boon could I ask from Heaven than such friendship as yours?"

She was too earnest, too sincere herself ever to think or suspect that anything was feigned, or that any one could feign.

"I am glad, too," she said, "that I have found a friend."

"Lady Lynn," he said, earnestly, "will you tell me how it is that you have this confidence in me?"

She looked up at him and smiled.

"I would if I could," she said. "I know no more and understand no more than I have told you. The first moment I saw you that voice spoke in my heart."

"But if we had not been introduced to each other——"

She interrupted him,—

"I cannot tell what might have been," she said,—"I know what is, and I am perfectly sure that such a voice could never have spoken in vain."

So they talked in the thicket of roses, and neither of them saw the long, sharp thorns beneath.

CHAPTER XIX.

"WHAT has come to Lady Lynn?" one asked of another. "She grows more beautiful every day, and she has changed, she is not so proud, so disdainful."

It was true the love that filled her heart shone in her beautiful face, softened her manner, made her kind and gracious. It was but the beginning, and she found it so sweet. The time had not come yet when she was to be startled or frightened, or to see in this, her new-born happiness, the faintest shadow of sin; it was so sweet—that was the pity of it—so unutterably, so pitifully sweet.

There was something to live for. Every day she woke wondering when and where she should see him, quite sure that she should do so. It gave a zest and interest to the day such as she had never known a day possess before. She woke with a smile instead of with a sigh; it was pleasant to dream of him, to see the handsome face smiling on her in her sleep; it was pleasant to meet him, to see the blue eyes brighten, for her to know that no matter how many were present they two were apart and alone; it was pleasant to lean upon his strength, to see him, so tall, erect and stately, by her side. She liked his pleasant, caressing manner; she liked to have him near her, there was a sense of safety and protection in knowing that he was with her and near her. It was pleasant when he drew the soft wraps round her shoulders, when he escorted

her to and fro, and she never thought how subtly sweet and dangerous it was.

She had an interest in life now: before she had little—or none; her heart was awake; before it had simply slept, yet even now, if there had been one hand stretched out, it might have saved her. She was naturally good; she had fine notions of honor aud morality. She was one of those who would never have willingly gone wrong, never willingly have done wrong. She never saw the end.

In every love story, let it end as it may the beginning is always so sweet; it was unutterably so to her whose life had known no sweetness, no tenderness or love save that of the major and Nora.

"I have found out what makes every one else so happy," she would say to herself; "it is because they have something to love. Now I am happy too."

She had no thought that this love was any dishonor, any wrong to her husband. Of that side she did not think at all—she was dazzled by it; she said to herself that she was a better woman for it—that she was more patient and gentle with the earl, more indulgent in all his little whims and tiresome fancies. She could well be, with the bright, beautiful light shining on her own life.

She was better in every way, then why should she suspect the love that brightened her own life was a bad love?

This was the beginning; there had been no talk of love between them—always of friendship; they never made any appointments, yet they never parted at night without knowing where and how often they should meet the next day. So—slowly, blindly, gradually, almost unconsciously—they fell into the snare.

They were together one evening at the Opera. Lady Lynn had gone alone, for the earl disliked singing as much as he did earwigs, and Sir Lionel had joined her in her box. She looked lovely and splendid as a young queen. She wore a dress of pale rose-colored velvet, shrouded in her favorite black lace, and the Lynn diamonds. She carried with her a bouquet of superb carnations, the fragrance of which penetrated far and near. Lady Lynn was very fond of carnations; she thought their fragrance the sweetest of all.

A vision of beauty, the light velvet of the opera-box was a background from which her dark, southern beauty was seen to perfection. Every glass in the house was levelled at her. A

whole regiment of opera-glasses would not have disconcerted Vivian, Countess of Lynn.

It was when the sweet, passionate music of "The Trovatore" floated round her that her heart woke first to a sudden sense of the great passion that filled it—that she became conscious of newer life, of something in her own heart that was keenest pleasure and keenest pain—that dazed and bewildered her. It was there, with the charm of the music all round them, with the sweet, subtle odor of the carnations about them, that Lady Lynn told Sir Lionel the whole story of her life. He listened with intense interest. What a sweet, sad story it was!

"It is like a romance, Lady Lynn," he said. "I always thought you were of Spanish descent. You are not like an Englishwoman, you have a peculiar grace, a peculiar style, a peculiar manner."

"Do you like Englishwomen best?" she asked, and there was such wounded love, such jealousy, in her voice, that he was not only immensely flattered but touched also.

"No," he replied, eagerly, "I do not,"

Never one memory of the fair, sweet face at home came over him —never one.

"You are thinking that an Englishwoman would have been more reticent with you." she said. "Perhaps so, but I do not see after all, that reticence is so very desirable; life is short enough and I do not see why, for want of a few words, we should miss some of the greatest pleasures it holds—do you?"

"No, that I certainly do not," he replied.

"I should imagine that Spaniards are more impulsive than other people," she said. "They are women of heart, quicker —quicker to love and quicker to hate."

"You could never hate," he said.

"Yes, I could—I think, I feel sure that I could hate any one who deceived me."

"No one would deceive you," he said.

"That is begging the question, Sir Lionel. It would not be well for any one who tried."

How beautiful, how mournful, the first wailing notes of the music sounded!

"That is what I could do," she said, her beautiful face softening. "I could sing my whole heart away."

The proud, bright eyes were filled with tears.

"You feel music intensely, Lady Lynn."

"I love it, I live in it," she said with an intensity that startled him. "It is only in music that my heart speaks at all. My life has been all repression. I have had a thousand thoughts, but no one to whom I could express them. I have had fancies, dreams, wishes, hopes, longings, all shut up in my heart, until it has ached with the weight of them, and I have had no one with whom I could talk them over, or who was interested in them."

"Do you know," she asked, suddenly; "what there is in a repressed life?"

"No," he replied, "I do not."

"Strange," she continued, with that sweet vibrating voice. "Strange that all my thoughts, my wishes, my hopes, and fears, the thoughts of long years back come rushing out now to you. Stranger still that I should have the courage to tell you so."

He was but a mortal man, and, he had never shielded himself against temptation. If there could be any excuse for treachery and weakness, he might have offered it then. With all the witchery of the sweet, sad music ringing and beating, like a passionate pulse in the air—with all the witchery of that beautiful face, the splendid dark eyes seeking his, the odor of the carnations so subtle and sweet, the vibrations of that exquisite voice, he was beside himself; he forgot the fair face at home; he forgot the little children; he forgot the fair names of honor and loyalty; he gave himself up to the wonder and the witchery of the hour; he gave himself up to the sweet influence of the beautiful woman who was pouring out the secrets of her heart to him. Slowly the passionate music went on, and he drew nearer to her. Once he laid his hand on hers, as it carelessly clasped the carnations, and she trembled like a leaf in the wind.

Then she should have been beware, but it was as the beginning of love always is—no matter how it ends—so sweet.

They stood together for a few minutes in the crush room.

"I shall never forget this night," she said to him. "I seem to have heard music for the first time, and it is because I have understood it."

He took her to her carriage, and the beautiful face had never looked so exquisite as when she glanced at him in the starlight.

"I wish you were going with me!" she said.

"Would you—may I? I shall be delighted if you could drop me down on the way," he replied.

"I shall be very pleased," she said. "Tell the coach man."

A few words to that attentive functionary and they were in the carriage together; he took his seat by her side. No thought of Dunwold now, no thought of the fair young wife and the little children, only of the dark, glowing, southern beauty by his side.

She held the carnations and he laid his hand over hers. She did not start nor tremble this time, but she sat looking at it, a strong, brave, capable hand, she thought, although it was white and slender. Suddenly, without rhyme or reason, without thought, acting on the impulse of the moment, she bent down and kissed it.

I, who write her story, who knew and loved her, who saw all the fine and noble qualities in her, grieve to write it. It was the warm Spanish impulse, which the cold English reason condemns. She saw the hand of the man she loved, and, bending her beautiful head with the quiet, graceful action of a frightened bird, she kissed it. Then her face grew burning red; she was frightened, confused, embarrassed; but the most chivalrous knight of olden times could not have been more chivalrous than Sir Lionel. He raised her hand to his lips.

"This is our compact of friendship," he said; and in her heart of hearts she thanked him.

"I told you I was impulsive, Sir Lionel," she said.

"Your impulses are all like yourself, sweet, adorable, and beautiful," he said.

"Do you mean that, really," she asked.

"Of course I do. How could they be anything else?" he cried. "You are the most gracious, as you are the most beautiful of women!"

"Only to you," she said, with a happy little laugh—"only to you. Do you know that others call me cold, proud, indifferent, haughty, and hard of heart? You alone say that I am beautiful and gracious. I feel inclined to believe you."

"You may believe me," he said.

"I have never heard such words before," she said. "Oh, how beautiful life is, how happy, how bright. I am glad I have lived. I do not think that any other world can be so bright as this."

He thought to himself what a strange mixture she was of different qualities, and then the carriage stopped at the steps of his club.

"I must go, I am afraid, Lady Lynn," but she only answered with a sigh.

"I know I must," he said, more resolutely. "I wish you would introduce me to Lord Lynn, then I could visit you at your house sometimes."

She gave a little start of ill-concealed delight.

"I had not thought of that," she said. "Yes, most certainly I will."

"Now I *must* go, every moment makes it harder. Good-night, Lady Lynn."

But when he looked at the beautiful face it was as pale as a white rose. He tore himself away, for the dark eyes, seen in the starlight, told him that which made it dangerous for him to stay.

CHAPTER XX.

VIVIAN, COUNTESS OF LYNN, sits in her boudoir alone. She is trying to think what this house will be like if the handsome, fair-haired Englishman became a constant visitor there. She smiles as she fancies the princely head and the laughing, debonair face here in her boudoir; what a different room it would be. Glencairn House was magnificently furnished; there was not, perhaps, a more luxurious home in England; but there was something cold and formal that even the sunny beauty of the young countess had not been able to remove; but she thought to herself, the sunny smile, the laughing, debonair face of this young Englishman would make a difference, would lessen the gloom. She would be delighted if he formed an intimacy with the earl, it would be such a relief to her. The earl was so old, so stern, so cross with her; the bright young life, the sunny nature, the gay, girlish heart, were overshadowed by this cross, jealous old man; but if Sir Lionel came to the rescue, if he visited the house, and imparted some of his bright spirit into it, life would certainly be improved. Even now she felt some little difference; there was an elasticity, a freedom, a glamour that she had never felt before, and she was both too young and too inexperienced to know that at this very juncture she ought to have taken warning. No man ought ever materially to influence the mind of a married woman except her husband, and certainly, just at this

time, the beautiful Vivian was not influenced by her husband at all. Sir Lionel seemed to direct all her thoughts, to guide her opinions, to form her ideas. The entrance to a human heart is like the entrance to the gates of Eden—an angel with a flaming sword should always be there.

If the entrance be well guarded the rest is sure; but in the case of Vivian Countess of Lynn the entrance was abandoned; no angel stood there with sword of flame. She never even thought if she were doing right in giving her thoughts and time to any one but the earl; from the first she made no defense, from the first she closed her eyes and let the strength and the sweetness of the great temptation overpower her.

If any one had suddenly stretched out a hand to save her—had said to her. "You are on the road to ruin; the first few steps are hidden by flowers, but thorns grow there sharp and deep," she would have paused at once, and have saved herself; but there was no one to speak—the world does not grow angry or moral over such subjects—the world never scolds or remonstrates until people are found out, then it grows moral enough. The beautiful young countess saw the flowers, and pleasant enough they were, but she saw nothing of the long, sharp, cruel thorns hidden beneath them.

She went to sleep that evening with the comfortable, happy feeling that life had grown lighter and brighter, she could hardly tell how or why; and her sleep was haunted by the laughing glance of dark blue eyes, by the debonair beauty of a man's face, and the caressing tone of a musical voice. It was better than dreaming of the angry old earl, with his sharp eyes and grim countenance; very much pleasanter; and she never stopped to ask herself if she were wrong.

Morning brought her fairer dreams, for she knew the day would not pass without her seeing him; in the meantime she thought much how she should best introduce him to her husband. In his way, the earl loved his wife; he was greatly disappointed in his marriage; he had thought to secure to himself in this young and beautiful girl a companion and a nurse—he had believed that in return for his wealth and title she would give him her time, her devotion, her interest. He had made no allowance for her youth and gayety; he was disappointed, because he found it impossible either to form her into a suitable companion for himself or change her into a model sick nurse. He might just as well have tried to chain a butterfly to a wheel. When his terrible fits of gout came on, his

beautiful young wife would rather have flown to the other end of the world than have attended to him, and the disappointment made him cross and jealous; the real fact being that the marriage was a cruel mistake, as all marriages without love are, and as all marriages between old and young must be. The earl was jealous, of no one man in particular, but of the whole world of men; he never cared to see his beautiful wife surrounded by admirers, and men amused themselves quite as much with the delight of arousing the earl's jealousy as they did by their admiration for his wife.

Even women of the world, accustomed to nonsense and intrigue, accustomed to study themselves and their own wishes, even they must find it a difficult matter at times to introduce the lover to the husband. Lady Lynn found no such difficulty. Although knowing him had changed the whole world for her, she had not admitted to her own mind that he was her lover. She was dazzled, as one who looks too long at the sun; the one idea that remained clear to her from many others was this—that if she could introduce Sir Lionel to the earl, they would become friends, and all would be well for her; but she knew that it must be done in a very casual and indifferent kind of way. She must not make a point of it, she must not even seem to care about it; and fortune favored her.

She persuaded the earl that day to go out. There was nothing Lady Lynn enjoyed more than riding, nor did her superb figure ever show to greater advantage than on horseback. With the earl it was a different matter—he had never been either an accomplished or a graceful rider, and now he cared less than ever for the exercise. He consented to go out on the condition that he went in the carriage and that his beautiful young wife sat by his side. Lady Lynn consented; there was no prospect of enjoyment for her, but fate and fortune might continue to help her. It was possible that she might meet him with friends from whom an introduction might come with good grace. So it happened. Sir Lionel was in the Row, with the Duchess of Kene, and the duchess, who admired Lady Lynn, was only too delighted to see her. The carriage was stopped, the earl was most gallant and attentive to the duchess, and she introduced Sir Lionel to him.

He remembered in the after days that Lady Lynn and Sir Lionel merely exchanged bows; that they said little to each other; and the earl had no idea that they were anything but ordinary acquaintances.

Plainly as beautiful dark eyes could speak, hers said to him,—

"Never mind me this morning, make yourself most agreeable to my husband."

Sir Lionel succeeded exactly; it was no flattery on his part; he had that faculty of understanding people at first sight that makes life so easy to any one; he understood the earl perfectly; he knew at once that the earl's great foible was that he liked to be amused,—he enjoyed a racy story, a piquant scandal, never dreaming that he himself would one day be the hero of the most piquant history of the day. During the ten minutes that the interview lasted Sir Lionel told one excellent story and two very pointed anecdotes. The earl was delighted.

"We have the famous wit, Sir Charles Rochester, coming to dine with us on Friday," said the earl, "you will like him, can you join us, Sir Lionel? Lady Lynn shall send you a card."

Sir Lionel was too worldly wise to jump at the invitation; the dark bright eyes watching him shone with delight.

"I shall be delighted," he said, "if I have nothing else, no other engagement."

"'If you have," said the earl, "you must give it up, Sir Lionel; I should like you to meet Sir Charles."

The dark eyes telegraped to him, "Hold your own," and he replied with a most courteous bow that he would look through his engagements; and Lord Lynn thought much more of him than if he had accepted the invitation eagerly.

"That is a fine young fellow," said the earl, as Sir Lionel went away. "Where did you meet him, Vivian?"

"At the Duchess of Kene's ball," she replied.

"You never mentioned him to me," said the earl, and his wife laughed.

"I do not remember the names of the people I meet," she said.

"But Sir Lionel is an exception. I should have thought you would have remembered him. You are strange in your selection of friends," continued the unsuspecting husband. "Now, I like Sir Lionel."

"I have nothing whatever to say against him," replied Lady Lynn, and he might have guessed the truth from the swift crimson blushes that covered her face; but, on the contrary, he fancied from her indifferent manner that she did not like him.

"I find," said the earl, "in these weary days, very few who

can make me laugh, very few who can amuse me. Sir Lionel can. I should like to cultivate him, and you with please me, Vivian, if you make the house pleasant to him."

The countess was almost frightened at her own success. Nothing could have been better. Sir Lionel would visit Glencairn House as the earl's friend; he would come often and stay long, and she should have many happy hours with him. So it was the earl himself who forged the first links of the chain that fastened them together. She could look in her husband's face and smile, for there was nothing that prevented her. The earl was delighted the next day, when a note came from Sir Lionel to say that he had so far changed his plans as to leave Friday night free.

"Vivian," he said, "Sir Lionel is coming, should you mind seeing the *chef* yourself? I should like something *recherche.* It is the first time he has dined with us."

Lady Lynn laughed.

"You would impress him, Luton, more than I should," she replied.

She thought to herself the probability was that, coming to the house for the first time, Sir Lionel would think little enough of his dinner, and care even less.

There was something singing in her heart all day, a new melody, that made her pulse thrill—that stirred in her veins like new wine—that brightened her life and made her happy. Was it the pleasure of a dinner party? Was it knowing that she had made a new friend! Was it the glamour left over her after that carriage-drive. Her face flushed when she remembered how she had kissed his hand; what had he thought of it? "A compact of friendship," he called it, and she said to herself that friendship was very beautiful—was by far the sweetest thing she had known in life.

"How long did friendship last?" she wondered. She would ask that evening. "For life," she hoped; for, looking suddenly ahead through the long course of years, she saw nothing, if their friendship should end, but blank despair.

She would ask him, and if he promised it should be for life, she would be happy. The light of that happiness, poor child, lay in her eyes and in her smile.

"You look so young and girlish to-day, Vivian!" said the earl.

And her maid wondered at the sweet snatches of song as she helped her mistress to dress.

CHAPTER XXI.

An event never forgotten in a woman's life is the first time she sees the man whom she loves in her own house. To Lady Lynn the pleasure was intense; that house, despite its luxury and magnificence, had been something of a prison to her. She had often longed for a companion, for her husband was none. May and December could never agree, and never will. December likes warm rooms, thick curtains, good wine, and repose. May likes the pure, fresh air, cool comfort, ripe fruit, and plenty of excitement. The young countess had never known what it was to have any one with whom she could laugh and talk at her ease; even her dainty boudoir seemed dull.

If the earl had been her father instead of her husband, she would have been very happy; as it was she was just awakening to a passionate sense of loss, and of want, and of something most sweet, yet most terrible, that she had not found in life.

That day stood out to her in clear and great relief against all the other days in her life. She had married without the least knowledge of life, of marriage, of the world; no one had made the least effort to save her. If the major had been living, he would have explained to her; he would have told her, that love was the sweet haven of life; but he slept as soundly as his young comrade at Galenza, and would never speak warning more. She had gone blindfolded to her fate. Hitherto she had pleased herself with all the pomp and splendor that surrounded her, and to-day—the day that he was coming—was perhaps the first when she had felt a personal pride in her magnificence. She was pleased the he should see that beautiful dining-room, with its few superb pictures, the grand carved sideboard, with its grand display of gold plate; the drawing-room that was not surpassed in all London for its artistic elegance.

It would all seem so much brighter when his laughing eyes had glanced round; she felt that a smile of his would have brightened those rooms with a radiance they had never known before. So in her heart this day a voice was singing, "He is coming—he is coming!" and she saw no harm in the words.

How should she dress for him? What flowers should she

wear? As he bent over her hand the other evening he had said that of all flowers carnations were the fairest—that they had the richest, rarest odor—that they were his favorites, and how beautiful she looked with them. Carried away by the fervid passion of the hour, by the magic of the dark eyes and the witching face, he forgot the flower that had been his emblem for so long, because his wife loved it—the sweet violet; no thought of it came to him; he was living in the present. Lady Lynn laughed to herself as she opened the pretty sentimental volume called "The Language of Flowers," wondering what, in that most picturesque of all languages, a carnation meant. Her beautiful face flushed, and a light laugh rippled over her lips as she read, "Carnation—ardent love." What a beautiful meaning, and how true! for ardent love must be as sweet and as subtle.

"I will dress myself in ardent love," she said; and for the Countess of Lynn to will or to wish for a thing was to have it.

When she went into her dressing-room it was hard to imagine where all those rich, fragrant carnations had been found; they lay in a golden heap—they suggested golden sunshine, perfumed air, gleaming dewdrops, bees and honey. She looked at them with delight.

"Ardent love," she laughed to herself—"what a quantity of ardent love!"

"Not silk, Florette," said the countess to her maid, who had laid ready a dress of white silk. "It must be lace with these; even silk would be too heavy for these. White, transparent lace over the silk, if you like; and I want the fine white lace to be fastened in fanciful folds with the flowers. I want the flowers in my hair, and the sprays of them to catch up the white lace. Do you see?"

"I understand," said Florette. "I will do my best."

As she looked at the beautiful, listless face in the mirror, the clever Parisienne knew that the one love that comes once in life had come to her mistress. She had seen much and had observed much and she knew when this fatal time arrived. She had lived with some to whom it brought happiness, with others to whom it brought death. She had served Lady Lynn with faithful devotion since her marriage, and this was the first time she had seen this in her face.

"The poor child," sighed the Frenchwoman. "It has come at last. I knew it must, with such eyes as those. She must love some one and break her own heart; she could not help herself. I wonder which of them it is?"

The maid's heart was heavy, for she had a true affection for her mistress, and she had never yet seen good come of a marriage between youth and age.

"She has no mother, no friend," thought Florette. "There will be no one to say a warning word to her, and she will go. Heaven send she may not destroy herself!"

Ah yes! it had come, for as the young countess looked in the glass with a smile, the light that never yet lay on land or sea was on her face; sweet smiles rippled over her perfect lips; sweet thoughts and hopes lay in her dark eyes.

She looked like the queen of the flowers she wore. The full young heart overflowed just as Florette had seen that it would. She was so unutterably happy she must speak to some one.

"Florette," she said, "do you know what these lovely flowers mean?"

"No, my lady," was the discreeet answer. "I have never had time to study the speech of the flowers."

Lady Lynn laughed.

"They mean ardent love," she said. "What a strange idea that a flower can express a sentiment!"

"They are not true sentiments, my lady," said the practical maid, but she felt more sure than ever in her own mind that the time had come.

No picture painted even by the greatest of men was ever half so lovely as the Countess of Lynn when dressed in the fine white lace and rich blooming flowers. It was true, though a perverted taste that led her to avoid all jewellery; she would not even wear one of the famous Lynn diamonds; she wanted all flowers, and the flowers that he loved. Her arms and shoulders gleamed marble white even under the delicate white lace; her face had a rich pearl bloom; her eyes were larger and darker than ever.

"Ardent love," she repeated, over and over again to herself, and the sound of the words without the sense even pleased her.

Those who sat round Glencairn House dinner-table that evening did not soon forget the brilliant scene; never had the queen of the season looked so beautiful or been so brilliant, she bewitched every one by her brightness, her wit and fascination. Sir Lionel was bewildered; she was the first of her peculiar type whom he had seen; his own wife was beautiful and accomplished she was clever and well-bred, but not one Englishwoman in ten thousand had the vivacity and the sparkle

of this wonderful Southern girl. She seemed to know and understand everything; in one little speech she could lightly touch on two or three popular topics.

Sir Lionel was bewitched; the earl was, for him wonderfully amiable; he enjoyed the society of the two gentlemen, and he enjoyed his wife's brightness.

During dinner Lady Lynn said but little to Sir Lionel; she knew that nothing short of an earthquake would prevent the earl from having his usual siesta, and then she would have a chance of speaking to him. Their meeting had been just a little embarrassing; his eyes had said so plainly, "How beautiful you look to-night;" and when he held out his hand to her, she thought of that deliciously happy moment in which she had bent to kiss it, and he thought of the same thing.

Now they were together. The earl had retired to his study for half an hour's rest, without which he could not enjoy the evening; most of the other guests had gathered round the piano, where Lady Lendower was singing, and the young countess was alone with Sir Lionel. She had gone to that part of the drawing-room which opened into the beautiful conservatory—a small conservatory, but so beautifully arranged as to look much larger than it was. A fountain played in the midst of the flowers, and the lamps were lighted.

No word was spoken; silence is often more eloquent than speech. Lady Lynn went straight to the flowers, Sir Lionel followed her. No thought of the fair young wife or the children at home went with him; in the witchery of that hour he forgot everything except the girl herself.

"How quiet it is here," she said. "What a charm there is in flowers and fountains, is there not?"

He came up to her and stood by her side looking fondly at her.

"It would be ill-bred, I suppose, to make any comment on the most beautiful toilet I have ever seen," he said, and there came to him, no memory of a fair-haired girl with purple violets in her white breast and in her golden hair—no memory.

"Do you know why I choose these flowers?" she asked.

"Because they suit you, as glowing crimson suits all brunettes," he replied.

That was the language of his lips, his eyes spoke quite another.

"No; I choose them because you said, the other evening, they were your favorite flowers."

Not even the gleam of pale violet crossed the eyes of his mind.

"They are so," he answered. "If I were to live forever I should never forget you as you are now."

"Come with me," said Lady Lynn, "I will show you what I think the loveliest flower in the wide world; it has silver leaves and golden bells. Have you seen it?"

"No; he replied, "I fear that I am not a very ardent flower-worshipper; some people seem to know all about flowers; I love some, and with them my knowledge ends."

They stood together where the silver leaves and golden bells threw out a rich, heavy perfume. But when they turned away the one magnificent carnation she had worn in her white breast was gone, and Sir Lionel held something near his heart.

Every dream of the pale, sweet violet had faded from his mind.

CHAPTER XXII.

Have any of you who read been present when the virtuous part of the world has discussed a scandal? When lately a peeress of the realm ran away with a young actor; when a peer of the realm ran away with the wife of a commoner; do you remember how the virtuous part of the world shrugged its shoulders and held up its hands in horror? how it declared that nothing else was to be expected, and that it had always foretold such a catastrope?

The very part of the world, before the *expose*, had connived at both affairs. It had invited the handsome young actor to *fetes* and garden parties, where he could meet the hapless young peeress.

It had smiled behind its face when some piquant little story of the unhappy lady's imprudence had been recounted. It had gone to the theatre with her, and had praised his acting; it had turned aside if the two were met together, and pretended not to see them. So in the case of the young peer; he was known to have a *tendresse* for the lady who was the wife of another man; but he was noble and wealthy, the world smiled so kindly. Those who wished to have the honor of his acquaintance used her as a bait; they invited him to meet her; *recherche* little dinners were given, where they could spend a few pleasant hours. If they were seen talking together, why it would have been the

very essence of ill-breeding to have disturbed them. If they wandered into a conservatory or a fernery, who would follow them?

But, when the *expose* came, when the man's home was dishonored, and the young peer had disgraced a noble name, the world who had connived at it was the first to revile them.

So now, when this beautiful hapless young girl was gone to her doom, not one friendly hand was held out to save her—not one. She was a *belle* and a beauty, a countess and mistress of one of the most magnificent and hospitable mansions in London. She was to be flattered and made much of; she must be pleased; and the world, that afterwards sat in judgment upon her and condemned her, did its best to please her. No sooner did this same world find out that she liked to be with Sir Lionel than it did its best to help her.

They were invited to the same balls, the same soirees, the same garden parties; people made little arrangements for going to the opera which included both.

If they were seen talking in the conservatory during a dance, do you think amongst that seemingly virtuous crowd any one had the bad taste to interrupt them; if at a garden party they chose a path less frequented than any other, had any one the ill grace to choose it also?

Oh, false and wicked world! Had any woman in it the moral courage to give this young creature one word of warning? to go to her and say, "You are young and beautful, you are in terrible danger, you have a husband stern and angry, old and ill-favored, but still your husband; and your duty, your loyalty are owing to him. It is a dangerous thing to form a friendship with a young man like Sir Lionel!" Do you think that any woman in that brilliant, heartless crowd had the moral courage to say these words to her? Not one. They invited her to meet him, they smiled at the little jests that passed about the queen of the season and the handsome young baronet.

No one had the courage, the kindness to rememder that she was very young, and that neither wealth nor position, neither rank nor title could fill any human heart.

She was an ornament in a ballroom, a wonderful attraction at a dinner-table. People came to meet her who would not accept invitations unless she were present; and she was always at her brightest and best when Sir Lionel was there.

Wheels within wheels, and those same remorseless wheels of society crushed her finally.

It was the same with Sir Lionel. Amongst the crowd of gray-haired men, not one spoke to him a word of warning; on the contrary, when they saw him coming each made way for him—no one attempted to monopolize her attention when Sir Lionel was present.

That is how the world acts—at first in a highly respectable fashion, and because it fears to offend any one in high position, it encourages the sin; then when the sin is found out, the sinner is simply crushed and ignored.

"To be found out" is the one sin that society never pardons. Is it worth while, then, to risk Heaven for such a world as this?

Lady Lynn had no time that evening to ask about friendship, as she intended. When the earl had finished his siesta and returned to the drawing-room, they had music and cards. To those two the world had all changed—they seemed to be alone, to exist in a different atmosphere; the glamour of love without the shadow of sin, was there. Although they were surrounded by others, they seemed to be alone; they were so entirely conscious of each other, and so completely unconscious of any one else; no matter who was speaking or what was doing, they saw and heard each other only. The earl was well pleased with Sir Lionel.

"I hope," he said, when the time of parting came, "that you will be a frequent visitor here, Sir Lionel. You do not reside altogether in town, you have a place in the country?"

"Yes, I live at Dunwold," replied Sir Lionel.

His face flushed as he thought what else he had in the country. An honest impulse came to him to say, "I am a married man; and my wife and children are in the country;" but it would be a sad pity, he thought to himself, to spoil this little romance; of course, it would end soon, but it was like nipping the bud of a beautiful flower to say that which would end this little romance.

Sir Lionel had loved the beautiful girl he married with the whole fervor of his heart; he loved her now, but he was thoughtless. He thought he had made himself safe by assuring himself that it was all right—that there was nothing in it. The most beautiful woman in England had taken a fancy to him, and there was an end of it. He could not be rude or abrupt to her; besides which, he liked and admired her.

It was a romance that made life sweet to him—that stirred the blood like wine in his veins—that made the world a dream of enchantment; and yet he assured himself that he meant no

wrong; it would end when the season ended, as most of those things did. Perhaps, had he never met sweet Elinore Gordon, he might have loved and married this beautiful girl whose dark eyes wiled a man's heart from his breast; but then she was married, so that nothing could ever come of it; it would end with the season, sweet as it was.

He could not help feeling his heart warm with every thought of her; she was so beautiful, so winning, so charming, and she seemed to rely so implicitly upon him. He thought of her more still two evenings afterwards when they met at a ball given at the French Embassy—Lady Lynn looking her best in a superb costume of gold and black. The earl had insisted that she should wear the Lynn diamonds; he was inordinately proud of them, and liked to see her brilliant beauty enhanced by them.

"Sir Lionel," said the young countess, "find me five minutes, I want to speak to you."

"What a pleasant command," he replied. "Will you give me the fourth waltz on the programme, and instead of dancing we will look through the rooms?"

"That will do," she replied, and the consciousness that she was to have five minutes with him made her so light of heart, so brilliant, and so beautiful that she was more admired that night than ever.

The time came. One or two smiled when they saw Sir Lionel and Lady Lynn pass through the ballroom. One man, who said afterwards that he had always known what must happen, laughed and whispered to his partner, "A *tete-a-tete!* One is never so alone as in a crowd."

"Are they lovers?" asked the partner, who was new to London and its ways.

"Lovers! no. That is the Countess of Lynn, said to be the most beautiful woman in London; the gentleman with her is Sir Lionel Rydal."

"If they are not lovers, why do you say they want a *tete-a-tete?*" asked Miss Simplicity, who would blush next year at asking such a question.

"They will discuss politics, pictures, or the musical glasses," he answered, feeling sorry that he had made any comment, while the two stood before a beautiful picture in one of the reception-rooms.

"I want to ask you a question, Sir Lionel," said Lady Lynn, and her face was pale with emotion.

"I will answer a thousand as easily as one," he replied, and then he wondered if, by any chance, she had heard that he was married.

"I want to ask you," she said, "if our friendship is to be for life?"

And the words struck him like the lash of a whip.

"For life," he stammered, and there did flash across him the memory of the fair, gentle wife at home; then he recovered himself. What mattered a few words more or less.

"For life, most certainly," he replied.

"You mean it?" she said, and her eyes were bright as two stars—"You mean it, Sir Lionel? I have been thinking about it; I could not see my way—it was like groping in the dark. I could not think what I should do if our friendship came to a sudden end. You do not mean that I shall die out of your life?"

"Never," he replied, quickly—the emotion in her beautiful face touched him,—"Never!"

She looked up at him—their eyes met; the beautiful face was so near his own, the lovely lips so close. He stooped down to kiss her, and he heard her say,—

"Oh, love! have I found but to lose you?"

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE next few days were one dream of delight to Lady Lynn. That kiss seemed to have taken her heart from her. The earl was not given to caresses—on strict art principles he objected to them; they disarranged everything. Since the major died, no one had ever kissed her face until now, and her heart had gone from her.

Sir Lionel was vexed with himself. A little trifling, a little odd love-making was a difficult thing. He wondered how he should kiss the lips of his wife, Elinore. Would she, with her quick, woman's instinct, find out what he had done?

Sir Lionel was ashamed; the deepest feelings of his heart were not engaged with this beautiful girl, it was her own admiration for him that had first drawn him to her. If she had not made the first advances, he would never have made any, would never have thought of such a thing, for his heart rested with

his young wife. It was her passion of admiration that pleased his vanity; and when a man's vanity is pleased, there is no more to be done. Sir Lionel did wrong deliberately, his eyes wide open; the flowers did not hide the thorns from him.

He loved her, after his own fashion, because she loved him; not with the deepest love of his heart, that was given to his wife Elinore, but with a love born of gratified vanity, she was so beautiful, and she loved him so well. All the kindly feelings of his heart were aroused for her; he saw how unhappy her life must be with that grim, stern old man, he knew that she had not the least affection for him. Why some one had not stepped in to interfere to save her from such a marriage, he could not think; he knew also, that the first passionate love of her heart was given to him, although he ought not to receive it.

It was his, and his heart went out with as great pity for her as did her love for him.

"It will only be a year's romance, just brighten her life a little, poor child! and then I must see her no more."

After that kiss, when he saw that her whole heart and soul were his, he quieted his conscience after this fashion. He forgot that it is far more difficult to extinguish than it is to light a fire.

In the meantime he agreed with himself that he might surely make her happy. She had not so much happiness in her life that he should refuse his share towards it. They had not much longer to remain together now, and he would be very careful afterwards; but surely, while these few weeks did last, he would and might make her happy.

"And after this," said the handsome young baronet to himself, "I will take very good care that I do not go out without Elinore; no man has a right to go about without his wife. There is nothing like a good, loving wife for keeping everything right and every man straight. Next season either Elinore comes with me or I stay at home."

Still, as he was there, and as she loved him so well, he might as well make her happy. To say that men are inconsistent is simply to say that they are human. When the idea presented itself to him that he should tell her he was married and had two lovely, loving children at home, he evaded it.

"I will not spoil her little romance," he said to himself. "We will have the next week or two, and then I will bid her farewell; even when I go I shall not tell her that I am married. It would but spoil the future."

The lovely, loving, impassioned child, how bright, original, beautiful she was. It was a delicious little romance, and in these prosaic days, when women marry for money and men for anything but love, it was certainly gratifying. He felt on very good terms with himself, and was proud to find that he had in him the power to attract such a magnificent creature. She had had the best men in London at her feet, the noblest, the cleverest, the best, and from all of them she had chosen him. He thought the better of himself for it, so, acting up to his resolve, he was kind to her.

It did occur to him once or twice to wonder what Elinore would say if she knew, but then women never quite understand these delicate little matters; of course she would not quite like it, but then she could not understand—women seldom understand each other. Just once it occurred to him to wonder what he should think if Elinore had "gone in" for any little romance of the same fashion; if any man had taken the same fancy to her, and had kissed her.

His face flushed with indignation. Surely no man would dare; surely his sweet Elinore would never allow such a thing. If he saw any man offer to kiss her he would knock him down; for himself—well, that was quite a different thing, quite another matter; there was one set of laws for men and another for women. He did not at all like that train of thought, nor would he indulge in it. Elinore was a perfect woman; this beautiful impassioned girl who had fallen in love with him was quite different, brilliant, faulty—she had nothing in common with Elinore.

During this time he wrote continually to his wife, long, loving letters, for he did love her, and they were all the more loving that he felt some little scruple of conscience over her. He would make it up when he reached home again; he had always been kind and indulgent; he would be kinder still.

So he satisfied his conscience as well as he could. At times the pathos and the pity of the story overcame him, and then he was cruelly kind to Lady Lynn.

Little notes found their way to his club: I "shall have a few hours to spare at such a time; will you come?" or "I find we are going to Lady So-and-so this evening; shall you be there?"

Sometimes the note would contain a quotation, a verse, some allusion to her own feelings, sometimes merely a flower, but that flower would have a message. Elinore had never taught him the language of flowers as this beautiful girl did.

In flowers she dared to be eloquent; they said many things she could not say for herself.

There was just one imprudence from which Sir Lionel guarded himself—he never wrote to her. Perhaps he had in his mind the fate of the hapless young peeress whose intrigue was discovered through her husband finding her love-letters. He never wrote one line, and so far he was prudent.

Up to the time when he bent his handsome head and kissed her, there had been no evil intention whatever in his mind; it was nothing but a pretty romance, and he had no more intention of leaving his wife and his home than he had of swimming down the Tiber. No sin is sinned at once, it is the sweet, treacherous beginnings which are so terrible.

Having, after a fashion, made his conscience easy, Sir Lionel gave himself up to the pleasure of being made love to by the loveliest woman in England.

There came a day when he asked her why and how it was that she had drifted into this marriage. It was a lovely May day; the earl had gone to spend it with some friends at Kene; he had urged his wife to go with him, but she declined. In her own mind she said that on this fair May day she would spend a few pleasant hours with Sir Lionel. So as soon as the earl had gone, she sent a little note by one of the footmen, who was to wait for an answer. Lady Lynn would not have been well pleased if she had seen the expressive wink that one footman gave the other. Fine ladies, who flatter themselves that they carry on these little flirtations quite quietly and unknown to every one, would be astonished if they only knew that every servant in the house knows all about it, quite as much as they know themselves.

When Sir Lionel first began to visit Glencairn House, the door was opened for him with an air of peculiar respect; the man's face said plainly—"This is a favorite visitor." The expression changed afterwards to one of mystery—they knew and understood. As the footman carried that note, he knew its contents perfectly well—that the husband had gone and the lover must come. It was prettily worded,—

"I should like to see you, Sir Lionel, this bright May day. Lord Lynn has gone out; I am all alone. Will you come and take luncheon with me? I will give you a poetical luncheon—fairest fruits and sparkling wine. This will be a red-letter day to me if we spend it together, and why should we not? Send me an answer by bearer."

He was delighted; already the brightness of the sunlight,

the blue of the sky, and the freshness of the air, had raised his spirits to the highest point of exhilaration. The thought of spending these hours with the beautiful girl who loved him so well was most pleasant, and just for once he permitted himself the imprudence of writing in pencil—"At noon."

The footman who carried back the answer, the man who opened the door to him, the one who announced him, all knew that Lady Lynn had sent for him, had remained at home purposely to see Sir Lionel, while she thought that she had managed the interview very cleverly, and that no one would know anything about it but herself.

Ah, that bright May day, certainly the happiest in her life! The sun had never shone so brightly, the world had never been so fair! Her happiness made her beautiful, and she did not disdain, on this morning, to seek every advantage from dress. She wore her prettiest dress—a white Indian muslin, with artistic dashes of crimson silk. She wore neither flowers nor jewels in the luxuriant masses of black hair; he should see it for once unadorned, and in all its native luxuriance; the loose waving masses were more beautiful than if they had been adorned by a diadem of jewels.

"If you looked like this always, my lady," said Florette, and then the maid, who honestly liked her mistress, sighed as she thought why she looked so beautiful.

Florette was not surprised—just as she was putting the finishing to her mistress' toilet—to hear that Sir Lionel was waiting for her. She saw the flush that came over the beautiful face, the light in the proud, sweet eyes, and the girl stood for a moment in profound silence and sorrow.

"They all go the same road," she said to herself. "If I could write the history of all the mistresses I have had, the book would hold a warning. It begins so well and ends so badly."

A beautiful flush covered the face of Lady Lynn as she met Sir Lionel with outstretched hands.

"How good of you to come," she said. "What a beautiful day. I thought we should enjoy a few hours. You had no engagements for to-day, had you, Sir Lionel?"

"I should have broken through them all for your sake," he replied, and he bethought himself what solemn and holy engagements he was setting aside for her sake already.

"We will spend the morning out of doors," she said. "There is nothing so sweet in life as the fresh air on a May morning."

CHAPTER XXIV.

"ONE day from a lifetime," said Lady Lynn; "and yet it will not be a day—only a few short hours, but we will enjoy them, Sir Lionel."

She looked so young, so brilliant, so beautiful, so like the fair May morning itself, that his usual prudence and debonair manner forsook him. He would have been almost more than mortal to have resisted that glance, and he was but mortal.

"One day from a lifetime," she repeated, looking at him with all the light of love in her dark eyes. She led the way through the conservatory to the grounds beyond—Glencairn House was fortunate in this respect, that when it was built land could not have been so valuable, for the grounds belonging to the mansion were spacious and well laid out. It was difficult to imagine, standing under the trees there, that one was close to the city whose roaring voice is never hushed.

The earl was very proud of his beautiful trees, although he had never foreseen the fact that his wife would one day walk beneath their shade with a lover. The green leaves had just formed, and they had that tender, luminous light that lies always on the spring buds; the few flowers that grew there were old-fashioned ones—a few lilies and roses, a great blush of southernwood, mignonette, and heliotrope—flowers that the earl loved, for he was old-fashioned in some of his ways. Pretty little seats were placed at intervals—there was one under the limes. Little did the Countess of Lynn think, as she took her seat there, that the wife of the man whom she believed loved her was equally fond of the lovely limes; and it was when they were seated there, the fragrance from the flowers floating over them, the sunlight falling through the green boughs, the perfumed air laden with sweet messages—it was then he asked her that question—

"How and why she had drifted into that marriage with the earl?"

"Was there no one to interfere and to save you?" he said. "It is monstrous, that union of youth and age—cruel and unjust! Was there no one to advise you?"

"No," she replied, "the only friend I had in the world per-

suaded me to consent. I call her friend, but I think she hated me because her husband loved me. She persuaded me into saying 'yes;' my own instinct was to say 'no.' I was more ignorant than most girls of my age—I was only seventeen."

"Poor child!" he murmured, and when she looked up again her eyes were full of tears.

"Are you really sorry for me?" she said. "No one thinks I need pity. I have money and title, the homage of the world, I have everything that should make a woman happy; I wear the finest diamonds in London; no one would think, to look at me, that I had a care in the world. As I drive through the streets, I see people looking at me with such envy, and I think —I think I would give the world to change places with some one who really is happy; and you, Sir Lionel, are sorry for me."

There was ineffable tenderness in the tone of her voice and her eyes filled with tears. What so natural as that he should kiss the white eyelids? and then the tears fell like two great pearls.

"Most certainly I am!" he cried.

She went on,—

"I could not think for some long time what had gone wrong with my life. I was so ignorant when I was married—I knew nothing about love, nothing about lovers—the dear good old major and Mrs. Lester had few visitors; I saw no society, nothing of the world, nothing of life; I believed what Mrs. Lester told me, that it was a great match, and that, surrounded by so much grandeur and magnificence, I should be very happy!"

"Poor child!" he whispered again, and she answered him.

"How sweet it is to hear that you pity me. Ah! Sir Lionel, we always learn when it is too late. I thought then that the best thing in life was plenty of money and plenty of gayety. I think now the only thing worth living for is love."

"What has brought you to that conclusion?" he asked.

Her eyes answered him, although her lips were silent. They answered plainly, "you," and he knew it was so.

He bent down and kissed her again. Just at that moment Elinore, his wife at home, was teaching her children to say holy prayers for him.

"I should have been much happier," she said, "if I had never found out why my life differs from others."

"It might have been so," he replied, "but such knowledge

comes to every woman sooner or later. I do not think one has ever lived or died without it."

The sweet, plaintive voice went on: "I am just awakening to a knowledge of all I have missed; at first I was content, luxury was a novelty to me, admiration was a novelty, even the dresses and jewels. I had no time to think of anything, my life was completely taken up with gayeties of all kinds; I never had time to realize that there was anything wanting in my life.

"For some months it did not dawn across me that, although I had won such a great matrimonial prize, there was something wanting in my life. What was it; why was I so restless—why was I always longing for excitement, never one moment at rest, never one moment content? I found that other people were happy in such a different fashion. Last year I knew Sir John and Lady Henderson—it was like a new revelation of life for me—they loved each other; they had two little children——. What is that?" she asked, hastily. "Are you startled—did you shudder?"

"No, it was your fancy," he replied. In reality those words. "Two little children," had been as two daggers in his heart.

"They were in town for some months, and I visited them often; it was there, in a happy home, that I first saw love was of any account at all. They were so happy; when Sir John went about the house he laughed and whistled and sang snatches of song, and Lady Henderson laughed such happy laughs. Now, I went singing into the drawing-room once, and once only, a song that my Irish nurse had taught me, sweet and soft like all Irish music. My husband, the earl, was there; he looked up with an angry frown.

"'Vivian,' he said, 'a lady sings only at the piano: it is neither good taste nor good breeding to go singing through the rooms.'

"Do you know, Sir Lionel, I was so young, so foolish, so sensitive, that my eyes filled with tears at the rebuke, and then he called me a 'baby.' I never let him see a tear in my eyes afterwards."

"Poor child," murmured the sympathetic voice again, and once more her face softened and her heart thrilled.

"Sir John and Lady Henderson used to spend some time every day in the nursery, and wherever she went she asked me to go with her. I had never thought of children as anything to love; I had never played with a child. Mrs. Lester always spoke of children as a great responsibility—as a great trouble

and expense. I hardly knew there was any other side to the question.

"But I saw so much love there between father, mother, and children that my eyes were opened, and I have loved children ever since. These two little ones worshipped their great, stalwart papa; they climbed upon his shoulders they teased and tormented him in every kind of fashion, but he was never angry, always laughing and well pleased with them; and the mother so proud and so kind. The love of children came into my heart that night, and it has never died out. I loved those little ones: a child seems to me the nearest approach to an angel, I love them so dearly. I think the man who has the clasp of a child's arm round his neck is sanctified and consecrated." Again she stopped to say—"How you started. What is the matter?"

"It is only your fancy," he replied.

"Do you know, Sir Lionel," she continued, "I went from that house where the husband seemed but to live in the light of his wife's eyes, and where the children made sunshine, and the very atmosphere was peace, and my own house seemed to me a prison—a dark, dreary prison, for there was no love now."

He bent down and whispered something to her—something, alas, that sent a crimson flush to her face and the light of gladness to her eyes; then her lips trembled piteously.

"It seems so hard," she said, "to live without love."

"No one ever does," he whispered to her. "Women can no more live without love than without air."

"Then what shall I do?" she cried.

He whispered again—the good angels were turning away by this time. The sun shone on; the birds sang; the beautful flowers sent out waves of fragrance. She raised her lovely, despairing face to his and repeated her question.

"If women cannot live without love, what shall I do?"

He was but a mortal man, and he answered her quickly.

"You shall have love, as much and more than you need!"

"Where?" she cried. "From whom?"

"From me," he whispered; and that was how the real tragedy began.

"From you?" she cried, and the accent on the word "you" was enough.

"Yes, from me, you beautiful, loving, hapless child!" he replied, and the silence that came was eloquent enough.

"It has come too late," she replied, despairingly. "This

beautiful love I have thought of and dreamed of—it has come too late."

"Not at all," said Sir Lionel. "Too late in some ways, but not in others. We can be most loving friends."

"Yes, I know that," she said, despondingly; "I know that, but my home will be as wretched. You will not be there?"

"I will be there as much as I can," he said, hating himself and the part he was playing, yet unable, as he thought, to extricate himself.

"It will not be the same thing," she said, piteously. "Oh, Sir Lionel, why do you think that Heaven, so merciful always, has let this knowledge come to me too late—too late?"

"Life is all a mystery," he said, forgetting that when people act in a straightforward manner, mystery dies.

"I had not much happiness when I was a child," she said, "but I thought I should be such a happy woman."

Ah, how sweet and how dangerous that sympthy was! how freely he gave it, how willingly she received it!

She went on in that sweet, plaintive voice until the heart of her listener was moved to most tender pity.

"You see," she said, "it will last for life, it is for life, and all my life is spoiled; if we had many lives, the spoiliug of one would not matter. Now so long as I live, so long as the sun rises and sets, so long as the tides roll and the winds blow no happiness will come to me; my life will be cold, brilliant, and hard; my house will be a beautiful prison; my heart will be cold, proud, hard, and bitter—so long as life lasts.

"Oh Heaven!" she cried, with terrible earnestness, "give me one happy hour out of it, one happy year, even if all the rest be torture to pay for it."

He laid his fingers on the soft, sweet lips.

"My dear," he said, gently, "my beautiful, hapless child, do not pray such a terrible prayer, lest Heaven in its anger should answer it."

She stopped, impressed by his earnestness; the sense of her own wild words had not reached her.

"I will do all I can to help you," he said, "to make you happy, to make the burden of your life lighter."

And just then that was all he did intend. We all know what road is paved with good intentions.

CHAPTER XXV.

THAT interview left its mark on the life of the Countess of Lynn and of Sir Lionel Rydal. Before then there had been imprudence and folly—afterwards, guilt. They had been carried away by the force of a great passion, that was a mighty whirlwind. Lady Lynn gave herself up to it: it was wrong, but it was the first love of her life, and it was as irresistible as the force of a lava tide, as the waves of a great ocean; there was no stem to the torrent, no ebb to the tide. It is always the case with natures like hers—passionate, unsubdued.

She was not yet quite alive to her guilt, but there was a sense of romance and mystery that was most delightful to her, and at times most embarrassing to him. More than once he had to beseech her to be careful, to mind by whom she sent notes and letters. On this May day, when the earl had gone to Kew, and his wife entertained her lover in the sunlit garden, he saw a certain conscious expression on the faces of the servants—a half-smile, half-keen, expression, as though they knew exactly how matters stood. Sir Lionel did not like it. At the end of their intercourse Lady Lynn, pale with great emotion said,—

"I shall keep the memory of this May day apart from all other memories. It is the first time any one has said, 'I love you' to me since the major died. How sweet the words seemed! Now let us make a compact. You love me, and you wish to try to make me happier. Let us be together as much as we can; you could come to Glencairn House every day, could you not?"

"Yes," he answered, "while I am in town."

She looked at him with love-laden eyes.

"And after?" she whispered.

"After will take care of itself," he replied, wondering in his own mind what it would be. "We live in the present just now."

"You will come to see me every day. I shall tell you all my engagements, and you must go to the same places; we know the same people."

"We know them all after the same fashion," he said. "I go to many houses where I know just the name of the host and

hostess, nothing more," and he knew in his heart that was the reason she had never heard of his marriage.

"So," she went on, with a glad light of happiness shining in her eyes, "we shall be so much together, and I shall be happy. Now," she added, "shall we have what I call a poetical lunch brought out here."

There could be no doubt but that in his heart Sir Lionel would have preferred more substantial comforts, but it was impossible to say so, and Lady Lynn delighted herself in ordering choicest fruit and sparkling wine; there were peaches that the sun had kissed into ripeness, grapes with a rich purple bloom. Lord Lynn was proud of his hothouse fruit.

"This is like the Garden of Eden," he said, and she answered with a little shudder,—

"I hope there will never be a serpent in it."

"I am sure there will not," he replied, but his heart shrank at the words.

"Where shall we meet to-night?" she asked.

"You are going to Lady Stroud's, and I have cards; we shall be there."

"And after?" she said. There was untold longing in her eyes; she laughed abruptly; there was something bitter in her laugh.

"I must be content," she said "but I do wonder what life must be when it is all spent with the one we love."

A beautiful flush came to her face.

"You will laugh at me, I suppose," she continued, "but I feel lonely when I am not with you."

He did laugh, but there was infinite pity in his laugh.

"When you are away from me," she continued, with simplicity that in any other case would have seemed adorable — "when you are away from me I count the hours until I shall see you again. Is it not strange?"

"No," he replied, gently; "I do not think it strange at all. Love is all watchfulness."

"Then—then—you think—you know that I love you, Sir Lionel?"

There was no elation on his face as he answered,—

"I do know, I am sure of it!"

In his own heart he felt inclined to add—"I wish it were not so." For the greatness of her love was beginning to move him with great pity. How would it end?"

So the pleasant hours passed in the sunlight with the sign-

ing of birds, the bloom of flowers, and the light that was to end in terrible darkness.

Sir Lionel had never felt less manly than when he went out of the house that morning; the grave bow of the stately butler, the peculiar expression of the footman's face, told him that the matter had been discussed in the servants' hall and judgment passed.

"I have counted the hours," she said to him that evening at Lady Stroud's ball, "and they passed so slowly, I cannot tell you how slowly, now they will fly."

"Is the earl here with you?" he asked.

"No, I am alone. Lady Greenaway offered to call for me, but there was a mistake over the time. I am alone, I have made no engagements; there are pretty, cool conservatories to wander through, and—and I have been counting the hours until I saw you."

There was no more to be said, he offered her his arm, and they went into one of the cool, fragrant conservatories.

In vain the music of the most seductive waltzes came floating in; in vain did one after another of Lady Lynn's admirers come in search of her and plead for a dance; she was in a paradise of her own, and she would not leave it.

And that night the first faint whisper to her disadvantage spread. Hitherto the mention of the beautiful young countess and her handsome admirer had merely provoked a smile; but to-night there was a faint whisper with the smile.

Yet those who saw her thought of her afterwards with pathetic light, she had never looked so beautiful, so queenly, so magnificent; her dress was of pale rose velvet, and she wore the famous Lynn diamonds; there was a delicate rose-leaf on her face, a bright light in her superb dark eyes; she looked so supremely bright and beautiful that the hearts of men went out to her, and they envied with jealous envy the handsome young baronet who monopolized her.

"Vivian," he said, when they had spent an hour amongst the fragrant blossoms. "Vivian, had we not better return to the ballroom?"

"Why?" she asked, briefly. "Why should that short hour of happiness be shortened?"

"I am half afraid." he said, slowly.

"Half afraid of what, Sir Lionel?" she asked.

"The world is so censorious and loves scandal," he replied.

"Scandal!" she cried, the rose-leaf on her face deepening to crimson. "Scandal! I do not understand."

"It was strange," he said to himself, "that she had a heart so capable of the most passionate love, yet in many things the simplicity of a child."

"You forget, "he said, gently, "how many men are longing to dance with you, and are hating me for keeping you from them."

"I do not care in the least," she said.

"Nor do I; but you see, Vivian, in some respects we must care. Now for instance, all these disappointed admirers of yours will talk together, and are sure to make the most of the fact that we have been here talking for more than an hour."

"They may say what they like," she said, with a quiver of her beautiful lips, "just what they like."

Sir Lionel felt slightly perplexed; she was evidently quite unconscious of the construction the world might put upon such a course of conduct. He did not like to speak more plainly, but he was compelled to do so.

"If we are to be friends as we agreed, Vivian," he said, slowly, "we must keep up appearance, that is," he added, quickly, seeing how she recoiled, "we must not give the world room to talk."

"I do not care in the least for the world," she said haughtily; and into the brilliant, beautiful face came a dash of scorn he had hardly thought it capable of assuming.

"My dearest Vivian, unfortunately we must care," he said. "I will show you why; if the world talks about us, and your husband hears, he would not allow us to meet even as acquaintances."

Then, indeed, she looked at him with a startled glance.

"Are you sure of that, Sir Lionel?" she asked.

"I am quite sure," he replied, slowly.

"Then I will study appearances," she cried. "I will study anything in the world you wish or advise. The world shall never talk about us."

And the prayer that rose from his heart to his lips was—"I hope, in Heaven's mercy it never may!"

"We will go into the ballroom," she said; "but I rebel against fate. I would rather spend ten minutes amongst the flowers with you than ten years in the finest ballroom with the nicest partners in the world." Then with a malicious little smile, she added: "If you dance with me, that will not improve the condition of affairs, will it?"

"No," he replied

"I shall detest dancing with any one else," she said, with

petulant frankness, most charming, but most dangerous. "It is a strange thing, Sir Lionel, that since I have seen you—known you, I should say—no other man has pleased me at all; they seem like shadows. I should love to dance with you."

He was half amazed, half amused, that this brilliant, beautiful woman cared so persistently for him. She was queen of the season—belle of the ball. Every man present was longing for a dance—a word—a smile, and she thought only of him—longed only to be with him. She was looking at him now with pleading eyes.

"If I dance twice with some one else—I do not care who it is—then will you dance with me?"

"You may be quite sure of it, if you will permit me," he replied.

"Is that prudent?" she asked. "Will that be studying appearances?"

"Yes," he answered, with a smile.

"It is a cruel, horrible world," she said, "not to let every one do as they like best."

"If we did what we liked best, we should most of us go to destruction," he said quickly. And her dark eyes filled with wonder.

"To destruction! Oh, no, Sir Lionel; I am sure we should not."

So little did she realize that she was fast going to destruction herself.

"I made a dreadful failure of it, Sir Lionel," she said when he came to claim her. "I feel much inclined to say that I will not dance again with any one but you. I could find nothing to speak about. My first partner asked me if I were tired; my second, if I were ill. And when I came to my senses I remembered that I had hardly spoken to them. That was not keeping up appearances, was it, Sir Lionel?"

"No, you must learn to do better, Vivian. Why do you always prefer my name by 'Sir?'"

"I like to keep up appearances; besides which, it is good manners, I imagine."

"Then my manners must be very remiss, for I always call you Vivian."

"I love the name Lionel," she said; "it is sweet and musical, like melting honey. Lionel, my name lacks the melody of yours."

"Not in my ears," he said.

"And in mine," she said, "there is no music so sweet as

yours. If I lay dead—oh, Heaven pardon me!—if I lay dead and your name was whispered in the long green grass above my grave, it would reach me—oh, my love, my love! it would reach me."

CHAPTER XXIV.

KEEPING up appearances is about one of the worst things any one can do. The worst thing that ever happened to Lady Lynn was the slight effort she made to keep up appearance. It led to many a secret meeting, to many an appointment that otherwise would not have been made.

"I must see you," she would say to him or write to him—I must see you, and if you cannot talk to me this evening, I "will be in Kensington Gardens this afternoon at four," which was a thousand times worse than if she had spent the whole evening talking to him in a ballroom.

Sir Lionel was far more nervous over those meetings than Lady Lynn. He was very careful always to keep away from the most frequented parts. He never refused her invitations, but he accepted them at times in fear and trembling.

Then people began to speak more openly of the flirtation, although they were ignorant of half its extent. One great fright made Sir Lionel more cautious. This was one day, quite at the end of May, when the lovely chestnuts were in flower, and the gardens were bright and green.

Early in the morning came the usual impetuous little note.

"DEAR LIONEL,—I have half an hour to spare this morning for Kensington Gardens. I shall be at our trysting-place at eleven."

It is only due to him to say that he did not want to go! that he would have given much to have declined; but it was the express wish of a most fair lady. What could he do?

Lady Lynn always chose one of the least frequented paths; but on this particular morning her favorite was already occupied—two or three people were sauntering up and down. Sir Lionel thought that taking a seat would be better than walk

ing—they would be less likely to attract attention. They sat talking—engrossed in each other—forgetting not only the green and leafy world around them, but the world lying outside that. They were alone in a fairyland of green leaves and sweet fancies, then suddenly, quite near to them, they heard the sound of men's voices: they both looked up suddenly, and saw the earl leaning on the arm of Lord Bury—the two gentlemen were talking earnestly.

"Lionel!" cried Lady Lynn—"do you see?—do you see?"

"Yes, I see, sit still, it will be all right, they will not see us."

"But," she said in a horrified whisper, "they are turning down this path, they must pass quite close to us," and her face grew white with apprehension. "Let us get up, Lionel, and go away quickly—at once."

"No, that would attract attention," he replied, "if you have the courage to sit still all will be well, if we rise and walk away they must notice us; if we remain quite still they are too much engrossed in their conversation to think of us; just turn your head a little aside."

"I am frightened," she whispered in a low voice, "I shall faint and fall."

"You will not, for my sake," he said, "you will be brave, because you come of a brave race. I will hold your hand, now they are coming; they must pass so closely that they will touch us, but the earl has his eyes on the ground and Lord Bury is looking at the earl; courage and silence for two minutes and then we are safe."

It is a terrible ordeal for any wife to sit by her lover's side while her own husband walks past.

Lady Lynn hardly breathed; they came so slowly, while to her every moment was one of burning suspense and torture, they came so near she could hear every word that Lord Bury was saying. He was a through Conservative, and he was calling the Liberals to task for what he thought some very foolish proceeding.

Every word fell like a drop of molten lead on her heart; if they would but hurry; but no, there was no quickening of the slow and steady motions of the two elderly gentlemen. So near—so near now that she heard every word; she recognized the peculiar fall of the earl's footseps; then they were quite close, and she knew that the earl in passing touched Sir Lionel.

Still there was no stir, no movement; she sat like a woman changed into stone. Sir Lionel held her hand tightly clasped in his own, and the next minute they had passed. The earl had never raised his eyes from the ground, and Lord Bury had made no sign. If they had watched him narrowly they would have seen that he gave a violent start, then passed on his way unheeding. In the cruel after-days, when this was discussed, Lord Bury was one of those who had nothing to say, and never made one comment.

"Why need I have been so frightened?" she said to him. "I am doing no harm. There is no more harm talking to you here than in talking to you in the drawing-room of Glencairn House."

"The world would not say so," replied Sir Lionel.

"It is always the 'world!'" cried Lady Lynn: "I am tired of the word." But all the same she had trembled at the fear of detection, and was delighted that the earl had not seen her.

Sir Lionel thought much more seriously over the matter. If the earl had seen him what would have been the result? Even at the very best it would have been most awkward.

If the earl had been told that they had met by accident, he would have been suspicious and hard to satisfy. Although he loved her with a passion that was not love, he felt that he should be almost relieved when the season was over, and he could go home. Her love for him was a passion, mighty and intense as any passion could be; his, on the contrary, was weak, and excited only by her admiration for him.

"It was a fortunate escape," said Lady Lynn; and the time came when the young baronet thought perhaps after all it had not been so fortunate, and that it might have been much better had the earl seen them.

Many such little incidents occurred, all of which returned to the earl's mind afterwards, one of which was this: He had gone out, as it was supposed, to spend a great part of the day with some friends, and was to return to dinner. Some mistake occurred, and the earl hastened home; it struck him that there was something more than surprise in the face of the servant who admitted him, something that made him say, "Is Lady Lynn at home?" and the servant answered, "Yes, my lord."

He forgot the trifling incident at once, and went on to the library. Opening the door suddenly, he was surprised at seeing Sir Lionel there with Lady Lynn. He thought nothing of

that; it was not an unusual time of the day for visiting, and Sir Lionel was a privileged visitor; it was no unusual thing to see him at Glencairn House at any time of the day; that did not astonish the earl, but what did surprise him was the expression of both faces; plainly as could be, he read surprise and confusion. Now, why should they show either?

It passed off. Sir Lionel was his genial self in a few minutes, and told the earl a few of the most humorous anecdotes he had heard at his club; but more than once, while the three were together, the earl glanced at his wife's face and wondered what it was that he saw there.

Again, looking at his wife's hand one day, he saw a new ring, one that struck him as being both novel and beautiful—two hearts made by minute pearls and fastened by diamonds.

"What a very beautiful ring!" said the earl, and then he wondered why his wife's beautiful face flushed burning red. He took her hand in his. "I do not remember to have seen anything like this. It must have been made after an original design."

"It is possible," she said, with an ill-assumed air of indifference.

"Did you buy it or was it given to you?" he asked.

"I have so many rings," she replied, "I cannot remember."

"I should have thought you would have remembered this. It is so curious and so pretty. Let me look at it in my own hands, Vivian."

The crimson of her face changed to deadly pallor. She made reply, but affected to take the ring from her finger.

"It is so tight," she said, "it will not come off."

"It will have to come off some time," he said, "why not now? I will help you. Why, Vivian, your hands are trembling!"

"They are not. What a strange fancy!" She saw that she must give him the ring—that he was bent upon seeing it. She took it from her finger and held it out to him. "If you like it so much," she said, "give me another like it, made of rubies instead of pearls."

"I will, if you like," he said.

He was always willing to gratify any desire of hers.

She thought to herself that a special providence had shielded her when he returned the ring without having seen what was engraved within—the two simple words "For ever;" nothing else, but they included everything, as they had been

graven by the desire of Sir Lionel, who had given her the ring in token of sincere friendship. She thought it a special providence that he did not see the words and make special inquiries about them. It would have been well for her had he done so.

Another evening, and this was the first time that the faintest idea of anything beyond merest commonplace occurred to the earl. He gave a small but *recherche* dinner party, to which Sir Lionel had received a special invitation—the earl never enjoyed a dinner so much as when he was present.

Lord Lynn was very attentive to his wife. On the morning of the dinner-party he was driving out, and saw some exquisite white heath and maidenhair fern ; it occurred to him that she would be pleased with this, and he ordered a quantity to be sent to Glencairn House. No name came with it ; the footman who received it gave it to the lady's-maid with a wink, and that wink was the cause of the mistake.

"As usual," he said to Florette, whose dignity was aroused for her lady's sake.

"I do not understand you," she said.

"Of course not," laughed the man. "It is one of the fine arts not to understand more than is pleasant."

Florette walked off with a toss of the head, too proud to ask a question, but quite sure, in her own mind, that the flowers had been sent by Sir Lionel.

So she said when she entered the room where Lady Lynn was——

"From Sir Lionel Rydal," and the young countess took the flowers in her white, jewelled hands.

"How beautiful!" she cried. "But is there neither message or card?"

"No, my lady," replied Florette.

"I shall wear those this evening," said Lady Lynn. "They will look well on pale blue silk. I will have no jewels—nothing but these."

She kissed the beautiful spiral white heath, and the graceful ferns. She loved them for the donor's sake.

She was pleased with herself that evening ; the pale blue suited her so well, the white heath was so delicate, and the ferns so graceful.

"I am glad to see you wear the flowers," said the earl, and she felt just a little surprised that he should make that comment Little did she dream that he had sent them himself.

"They are very precious flowers," she said with a smile. "I treasure them very much," and the earl was delighted.

It often happens in this world that the things which most grieve most please us.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE first thing that struck Sir Lionel that evening was the exquisite flowers that Lady Lynn wore. The heath was so delicate, and it was so beautifully arranged with the fern.

"You have excelled yourself to-night, *ma belle*," he whispered.

"Thanks to you," she replied, and he thought she alluded to the pleasure in his coming.

Everything passed off as usual. The earl went to his study for his usual *siesta*. Lady Lynn had led Sir Lionel to the other end of the drawing-room to show him some fine engravings, and the other visitors present had too much tact to interrupt what was evidently a very pleasant *tete-a-tete*, and not a very short one.

It ended when the earl re-entered. It was growing late then, and most of the visitors were taking leave. Suddenly his eyes fell on Sir Lionel, and to his amazement he saw a spray of white heath and maiden hair in the button-hole of his coat. He could hardly believe his own senses, but it was evidently true. The earl looked at his wife, and saw at once that from the bodice of her dress the little spray was missing

He was electrified. Could it be possible that his wife had taken a flower from her breast to give to any one? Strange to say he did not feel jealous—it was not that, it was wonder and surprise, and the desire to know the reason why she had done it.

He went up to her. She was standing a little apart reading the words of a new song. She looked up just a little startled.

"Vivian," he asked, "did you give that white heath to Sir Lionel?"

"What white heath?" she asked, but it was to gain time for one moment's thought that she asked the question.

"It looks somewhat singular and pointed," he said. "You

are wearing certainly the prettiest flowers in the world and Sir Lionel has the same. Did you give them to him?"

"Yes," she replied, thinking truth in this case the safest.

The earl arched his eyebrows in a slightly scornful fashion.

"Do you not think it a rather pointed thing to do?" he asked—"to give flowers from your dress to a stranger?"

Her heart sank for one half minute at his words; then flashed across her mind the memory of what Sir Lionel had said about keeping up appearances. In this instance she had indeed failed—she had given the flowers from her dress without remembering that the earl must recognize them.

"I gave them to him," she said, slowly, "out of politeness, though perhaps it was a foolish thing to do; but then he sent them all to me."

"Who?" cried the earl. "Of whom are you speaking? Who sent you the flowers?"

"There is no harm in it," she said, quickly. "I repeat, Sir Lionel sent me these."

"He did not. I sent, or rather, I bought them for you myself this morning; and this is your thanks, your gratitude, Lady Lynn!"

"I assure you," she replied, "that I have been mistaken. I really thought Sir Lionel had sent them this morning. I must apologize."

The words softened him a little, but he was puzzled.

"Why should you think Sir Lionel Rydal sent them more than any one else?" he asked.

She was almost afraid to answer, "Florette said so," lest there should be a fresh complication with her.

"I do not know," she answered; "I cannot tell you why I had that impression. I had it, most certainly."

She did not add that they had now lost all value in her eyes; she conquered herself, and looked at him with a smile.

"My thanks are due to you," she said. "If I had known, I should not have given one fern-leaf away."

That pleased and delighted him, so the affair passed over without any unpleasant results; but that was also a narrow escape. When the evening ended, and the young countess was alone with her maid, she turned to her quickly.

"Florette!" she cried, "how did you make this mistake over the flowers?"

"What mistake, my lady?" asked the girl, innocently enough.

"You told me that Sir Lionel Rydal had sent them."

"So he did, my lady——" Then she stopped abruptly, remembering what the footman had said and her own interpretation of it. "At least——" she added, abruptly, then stopped.

"At least what? Speak out. I do not like mysteries. Which footman brought them to you?"

"John Goode, my lady," was the answer.

"Then what did he say, that you made such an absurd mistake?"

"I would rather not answer, my lady—I would indeed."

"I insist upon it," she continued. "I will know what the man said. I was very much annoyed over it."

"I hope you will not blame the man, my lady. He certainly never thought the remark would reach your ears."

"I am aware of that. I wish to hear it nevertheless," said Lady Lynn.

The girl blushed painfully.

"I am ashamed to repeat it; but if you insist, my lady—it happened in this way. The man brought the flowers to me, 'For Lady Lynn,' he said, 'as usual.'"

"I see!" cried the countess, "and you thought 'as usual' meant from Sir Lionel?"

"I did, my lady," replied the girl, shyly.

"And you repeated this to me without any further warranty? You did wrong, Florette; you caused me to make a great blunder. I hope you will be more careful. The man was insolent, but why should *you* think that 'as usual' meant Sir Lionel Rydal, Florette?"

"I do not know, my lady. I am very ignorant and very stupid. I am sorry, too, if I made any mistake."

"It is a bad thing to think for yourself always," said the young countess, "and you must be more careful for the future; you must be accurate in names. It was 'Lord Lynn' who sent the flowers. I assure you it was a most unpleasant mistake."

Florette could understand then what the situation was.

"I am very sorry, my lady," she repeated, "and I will be more careful for the future."

When Lady Lynn repeated that little story to Sir Lionel, she wondered why he grew white and trembled.

"You did not tell me you were going to the opera last evening, Vivian," said the earl to his wife a few mornings after this. "How was it?" She had not intended to tell him because Sir Lionel had promised to join her there. "If you had told me, I should have gone with you."

"I am sorry—I did not know—I thought that singing and ear-wigs were your great abominations," she added, laughingly.

"I should have gone with you. Sir Weston Hammer tells me he saw you, and that you were the loveliest woman in the house."

"I am much obliged to Sir Weston," she said, laughingly.

"He says Sir Lionel Rydal was in your box the greater part of the evening."

In vain she tried not to blush—not to let the crimson flush mount to her white brow. No rose was more red than she.

"Was he?" she answered, trying to speak indifferently? "So many people came and went, I hardly remember who was there."

And the earl said no more.

Another day as they took five-o'clock-tea together, he said to her,—

"You were in the Row, yesterday, I hear, with Sir Lionel Rydal."

"Yes, we met and enjoyed a ride together. I should like to ride with him in the country, where there is plenty of scope, over a breezy hill or heather-clad downs. He is a fine rider.

"So was I when I was young," said the earl; and there was something of pathetic regret in his voice that touched her sensitive, passionate heart. She looked at him with wondering eyes. Could it be possible that the man, who looked so old, so stern, so gray, had once been young, like Lionel—young, handsome, gay of heart, with every pulse thrilling with life?

"Why do you look at me with such wondering eyes?" he asked. "Of what are you thinking, Vivian?"

"I was wondering," she replied, thoughtlessly, "what you were like when you were young."

He frowned, a quick, impatient, angry frown.

"People do not care to be reminded of their age, Vivian, neither is it in very good taste to remind them of it."

"I did not mean to do that. I never thought of it. I was merely wondering, and you asked me what it was about."

"I was a very handsome young man," said the earl, "and —and—very gay—fond of all sports."

"Time is very cruel," said the young countess; "it spoils all beauty. I was looking at Lady Carlyle's hands the other day; they are white and covered with shining gems, but they look so dry and withered."

"There is a beauty of old age." said Lord Lynn.

"I do not care for it!" cried the young countess of twenty, and the earl felt deeply annoyed.

By this time, and by dint of different stories, he had the idea in his mind that Sir Lionel and Lady Lynn were very good friends. He had not reached the jealousy stage as yet. That was to come.

One morning, going quite unexpectedly into her room, he saw lying upon the table an exquisite little locket of plain gold with one diamond in it.

"A locket," he said; "what a pretty one; what good taste."

Lady Lynn came swiftly to him, and held out her hand as though she would take it from him.

"It is very pretty, Vivian," he said. "You have good taste for jewellery." He opened it, and there was a portrait of her own beautiful face inside. "Why, Vivian," he cried; "this is you! Do you wear your own portrait?"

"No," she replied; "at least I have not done so yet."

She had seen the locket at the jeweller's and had thought to herself what a beautiful present it would make for Sir Lionel, if she placed a portrait of herself inside. She did so, and it lay on the table ready to be packed in a pretty little box, with a pretty little letter.

Now, with her quick insight into everything, she saw that, even if she gave it, Sir Lionel could never wear it now that the earl had seen it. Quick as lightning she made and seized the opportunity.

"I am sorry you have seen it," she said; and those words were truthful enough. "It is a present intended for somebody."

Then she took the pretty locket and fastened it to his chain.

The earl was charmed and delighted; his wife had never done such a kindly, graceful action before. But Lady Lynn looked pale, and her eyes dropped. Deceit did not come naturally to the daughter of the gallant soldier who had fought and died for Don Carlos. She was humiliated in her own eyes, yet in the emergency she had acted for the best. She purchased another locket, and this time she was careful that no one should see it. When the young countess told Sir Lionel of this, he said that she was forgetting his teaching about keeping up appearances, and that unless she was more careful, something unpleasant would happen.

It happened then that the earl began to think about Sir

Lionel, to note the frequency of his visits—he was at Glencairn House every day—to note how much time the baronet spent with his wife ; and although he suspected nothing, he felt that it was a little imprudent ; but she was young, and loved gayety.

If Lady Lynn had seen, or could have known how kindly her husband felt towards her, perhaps the tragedy would not have happened.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A PARTY at Lady Bury's—not a ball or a *soiree*, but that which her ladyship liked far better—a few friends to dinner and a pleasant evening afterwards. The earl and countess had both been invited ; the earl declined going, as he did not feel well ; Lady Lynn went herself, and, as a matter of course, considering that Lady Bury was a perfect woman of the world, Sir Lionel was invited. Amongst those women who sat in judgment on her afterwards, there was no one who had not, on every occasion, invited her to meet the young baronet.

A very pleasant evening—one of the last they spent together. Lady Bury was herself an accomplished musician. She had set the beautiful stanzas of Bryant's to music. Words not half so well known as they should be.

" Ah, no, it never crossed my heart,
To think of thee with love.
For we are severed far apart,
As earth and arch above.
And though in many a midnight dream,
You've prompted fancy's brightest theme,
I never thought that thou could'st be
More than that midnight dream to me.

" A something bright and beautiful,
Which I must teach me to forget,
Ere I can turn to meet the dull
Realities that linger yet.
A something girt with Summer flowers,
And laughing eyes, and sunny hours ;
While I, too well I know will be,
Not even a midnight dream."

Under cover of that singing the two had drawn together
" What beautiful words they are," said Lady Lynn.

Sir Lionel interrupted her.

"Two of the lines apply to yourself," he said.

"'A something girt with Summer flowers,
And laughing eyes, and sunny hours.'

"In my mind," he said, "you will always be associated with Summer flowers. When the carnations bloom it will be to me as though I had a message from you; when I see the crimson fuchsias, how they will recall you to my mind."

They were as much alone as though there had been no other person present; they were sitting in the deep recess of a large window, where a pretty couch had been placed, and a stand with magnificent ferns; a few books lay on the table, and it was with these books that they seemed to be deeply engrossed.

Lady Lynn looked exquisitely lovely in a costume of blue and silver, white lilies in her hair and in her dress. She was so beautiful, so loving, so impassioned, so dainty and tempting, that the young baronet was carried out of himself—he was beside himself; he was intoxicated with her beauty and her grace, as a man is intoxicated at times with rare wine.

"This has been a happy evening," he said to her—"I have enjoyed it more than I should have done a ball or a larger party. Everyone does as he likes."

"I have done what I liked best," said this beautiful, impassioned daughter of the south—"I have talked to you. Of all pleasure on earth," she added, "that is the greatest to me."

He clasped her hand, and words rose to his lips that his heart condemned even before they were uttered; but the passion of the moment carried him away. The light, the flowers, the music, the beautiful face and love-lit eyes of the charming woman were too much for him—the late shadow of prudence, of reticence, of honor, of loyalty, died away.

There was no loving word that he did not use to her, no loving epithet that he did not lavish upon her. No thought came to him of the fair children and the young wife at home—no thought of loyalty; he was carried away by the syren's charms, by the witchery of a woman whose very glance was enough to madden the wisest of men.

Carried away—given up to the glamour of the hour, mad with the dark, imperial beauty—intoxicated with her loving, winning grace—he said words to her that could never be unsaid, words that burned their way to heart and brain, and left

a brand never to be effaced, and she, hapless, loving girl, was carried away like himself. While they both lived they never forgot the mad passion of that hour.

"I wish—I wish," she whispered, "that I could be always with you, Lionel."

"So do I. Indeed, I do not know how I shall live without you."

He stopped abruptly, for just at that moment the music ceased, and Lady Bury, turning from the piano, spoke to her husband. She glanced at them, setting in the pretty nest of ferns, and something like a thrill of apprehension and fear went through her mind. She had never heard that Sir Lionel was married, but she knew that the manner of the countess was not quite what it should be. She said to herself that she would sing one more song, so as not to seem abrupt, and then she would interrupt them. She sang one that, in some mysterious fashion, touched Sir Lionel, for it was one that his fair wife at home had sung.

"NOTHING BUT LEAVES.

"Nothing but leaves—the spirit grieves
Over a wasted life,
Sin committed, while conscience slept;
Promises made—but never kept;
Hatred, battle and strife,
Nothing but leaves.

"Nothing but leaves—no garnered sheaves
Of life's fair, ripened grain;
Words, idle words, for earnest deeds;
We sow our seeds—lo! tares and weeds;
We reap with toil and pain
Nothing but leaves.

"Nothing but leaves—memory weaves
No veil to screen the past;
As we trace our weary way,
Counting each lost and misspent day,
We find, sadly, at last,
Nothing but leaves.

"Nothing but leaves—withered leaves,
And shall we meet our Master so,
Bearing our withered leaves?
The Saviour looks for perfect fruit;
We stand before Him, humble and mute,
Waiting the word He breathes,
Nothing but leaves."

Whether Lady Bury thought those were words that might be beneficial, or whether it was by mere accident that she chose this song, it was impossible to tell; the effect of them was something wonderful; they roused Sir Lionel like the lash of a whip; before him came the fair face of his wife; he saw the home picture, the beautiful room with its flowers, the piano where his wife sat, the lovely little children; they came before him like ghosts; he heard the sweet voice of his wife, he could see the true and tender eyes that had never looked with love on any man save him; oh, true and tender eyes, the very light of which was so soon to be quenched with tears.

It struck him like the lash of a whip; what was he doing—was he mad?

"I am a craven hound," he said to himself with closed teeth, "a miserable craven hound." Sin committed while conscience slept! Where was conscience, his manhood, his honor, his loyalty, his truth? In that moment's revulsion of feeling, he could have crushed himself.

"Lionel," said the sweet, seductive voice, "what is the matter? your face has grown so white, and your eyes have changed. Oh, love! all the love has died from them; they frighten me."

She drew just a little nearer to him; the perfume from the flowers she wore reached him. Heaven help a man tempted as she tempted him!

"Love, you have changed to me," she said, her passionate eyes seeking his—"you have changed to me. What have I done?"

"'Sin committed while conscience slept,'" he said, in a low voice. "Oh, Vivian, I have done wrong; I have talked to you about love, and, my dear, you are another man's wife!"

There was a minute of almost terrible silence, and then she said, in a low voice,—

"But I do not love him. Oh, Lionel, I love you—you—only you!"

"But, my dear, it is useless," he said. "Why, Vivian, I have been in a long dream, and there is a terrible awakening, a long, mad, foolish, wicked dream. Vivian, it is all my fault. In spite of all that sages and philosophers have said, I thought there might be friendship between man and woman: in such a case as ours it is impossible. Do you see where we are drifting?"

"Yes," she replied, and he never forgot the eyes she raised

to his. "Yes ; let me so drift on to death, love. I cannot live if you cease to love me !"

"I will never cease to be your best friend, but I must not talk to you about love. You are another man's wife."

He had not the moral courage to add, "And I have a wife of my own." It would have made all the difference.

"What has made you think of that now ?" she asked.

"The words of the song—'Sin committed while conscience slept.' Do you know I have hardly realized what I was doing ? Forgive me, my poor, beautiful child ! I ought to have known better."

"Do you mean that you ought not to have loved me ?" she asked, piteously.

"I do mean it. I am vexed with myself ; you have trusted me and I feel that I have betrayed my trust. We may be the dearest of friends—we can be nothing more. The dearest of friends," he repeated.

And then Lady Bury came up to them, but when she saw the expression on both faces she went away again ; better not interrupt that *tete-a-tete.*

"Oh, Lionel," she cried, looking up at him with eyes full of pathos. "Oh, Lionel, my love, how can we be the dearest of friends ? I love you !"

He looked, as he felt, throughly distressed, grieved.

"I cannot say half I think, Vivian ; it is all my fault ; if I had been more guarded—more prudent."

"But you love me, and I love you, Lionel ! Oh, Lionel !"

No words could tell the pathos of that cry.

"It is too late," he said, "too late for love of that kind between us. I cannot tell," he cried, with some agitation, "I cannot tell how it is that we have drifted into this. I am sorry and ashamed, Vivian. It is almost a mystery to me. We have drifted into it."

"But why," she repeated, piteously, "why have you just thought of it ? If it be so very wrong it has been wrong all the time."

"My dear," he said, gently, "you do not understand. We began by being pleasant acquaintances——"

She interrupted him.

"No, it was never that," she said, sadly. "When my eyes fell first on your face, that very moment you were quite different to all other men. Something seemed to wake in my heart when my eyes met yours. To you it may have been but a pleasant acquaintance, to me it is life or—death ! Do you re-

member how I wondered whether it was fate or Providence that sent me to that ball? Do you remember the little things that happened over which I puzzled so—to know whether they were really omens—bad omens, or mere coincidences. Do you remember it, Lionel?"

"Of course I do," he replied—"I could never forget it."

"So you see," she said, "it was never a pleasant friendship, at least on my side. Oh, Lionel, you know it has been the love that is my doom?"

He rose abruptly.

"I cannot bear to think of it," he said, in a saddened tone.

She touched his arm lightly.

"You must not go, Lionel," she said, in a low, pained voice "I am quite sure that if you leave me in this fashion, I shall fall down dead!"

And then Sir Lionel knew the extent of the mischief done.

CHAPTER XXIX.

"I WILL see you to-morrow, Vivian," said Sir Lionel. "Try to control yourself, dear. See, Lady Bury is looking at us; she will suspect something if you look so desperate."

"I am desperate," she said. "If you leave me now, I tell you, Lionel, I must die."

"I will not leave you; but see, people are wondering, I am sure, at this long *tete-a-tete*. I will see you to-morrow, Vivian, and we will talk over what we must do. You have no particular engagement; you spoke of going to the Royal Acaedemy: may I meet you there?"

"Yes," she replied; "but if you are going to speak to me of parting, I will not come. Oh, Lionel, surely our—our friendship has gone too far now for any drawback. I could not live without you. What would the days bring me but endless pain, endless misery, horrible pain? I could not endure them."

All the bloom died from her beautiful face, and the misery of the dark eyes touched him more than words.

"We need not talk about parting, Vivian; but we must arrange for our future. When one's eyes are open to danger, then comes the time to shun it, and *we* are in danger, Vivian; we have given ourselves up to a dream."

"Dream or no dream," said the girl, "it is all too late.

You have taught me to love, Lionel ; you have taken my heart from me, you have made yourself the sun and centre of my life ; it is too late to draw back."

" Vivian," he said, gently, " for your own sake try not to look so despairing. My dear, if any one saw your face now they would say——"

She interrupted him ; her despair even lent a dignity and grandeur to her.

" I do not care ; it is not of lookers-on I have to think, but of myself—myself— what I must do. You cannot leave me, Lionel, we cannot part. I—oh, Heaven——"

For one moment he thought she would fall ; but she steadied herself by a great effort.

" Vivian," he whispered, " wait until to-morrow ; we shall be alone to-morrow, and we can talk ; now is a most dangerous time. Vivian, look up at me and take courage until to-morrow."

She had no chance of making any reply, for their hostess approached them at that moment and all further chance of a *tete-a-tete* was destroyed. The visitors who left the house that evening spoke to each other in low whispers—the dark cloud was spreading. How that evening ended for the beautiful, hapless young countess, she could never quite remember. when she reached home, late as it was, or rather early, she found a message awaiting her from the earl to go to him at once. He had retired to rest soon after Vivian's departure for Lady Bury's but sleep would not come to him, and as he tossed from side to side a sense of injury grew in his mind that made him ignore the fact that he had offered no objection to his wife going to the party without him. He was restless and irritable—nothing that his valet did pleased him—he swore at the footman. " Send the countess to my room ! " he cried ; to himself he added, " Of what use having a wife, if she does nothing but enjoy herself ? Other men's wives attend to them when they are ill, why should not mine ? "

He had a nervous headache, and if she would read to him it might pass. He did not observe the highly-strung state of her nerves, the great tension of mind and brain, the tragedy in her face and eyes. If any one who loved her had met her just then, they would have seen that she was dazed with distress and despair. Her dark eyes were full of tragedy ; she tried to stifle the greatness of her pain and bewilderment. What did it mean, that in the full light of their love and happiness, there should come this sudden darkness and anguish ? Five

words of a song had opened the heart and mind of a man to a sense of what he was doing and where he was going,—

"Sin committed while conscience slept."

As she went from the drawing-room to the earl's rooms she asked herself was it a sin to love the fair-haired debonair man, to whom her heart had gone out unwittingly—to whom fate had led her? No one had taught her much about religion; the good major had heard her say her prayers, and had listened while she read a chapter from the old family bible at night—more than that he did not undertake—but the good major had never attempted to teach her anything of the trials of life—of its difficulties and temptations. She was totally unprepared for them, and she asked herself now if it were possible that this love, which had come to her as a glorious revelation, could be a sin?—why was it possible for anything so beautiful to be wrong?

Could they be parted after all that had passed between them? Ah no! a thousand times, no!

"The earl wishes to see you at once, my lady," said a footman, meeting her; and she hurried a little.

All the sorrow and tragedy of her story was in her face as she entered the room where the earl was; but he saw nothing of it—he thought only of his nervous headache—he had long since forgotten the hopes and fears of youth.

"I want you to read to me," he said; "my head aches badly; I am depressed in spirits—you should not leave me alone so long."

"I went with your full knowledge, sir," she replied; but she spoke in a dazed, bewildered kind of fashion, as though she only heard and half understood.

"But you stayed much too late," said the earl, complainingly. "I suppose you met Sir Lionel there, as usual? What did you find to talk about?"

Ah! what indeed! Her heart answered the question. He did not wait for an answer, but went on,—

"What with a party one night, a ball the next, no one can get proper attention. You never read to me or attend to me."

"I am more than willing to read to you," she said; and she went to the table where one of his favorite works lay; and she wondered to herself how she should see the words—her eyes were dim with pain—how she should sit there calm and col-

lected, when every pulse was beating with passionate pain, every nerve thrilling.

He did not see how the white, gemmed hands trembled, he did not think of her at all. She was a fair white slave, purchased by his title and wealth. He did not notice the faltering tones of her voice; he only thought she read uneavenly, and not as well as usual. That her thoughts could be anywhere else, he never dreamed—a man's wife is his own. In her whole life she never forgot the pent-up agony of that one hour. Her lips were moving mechanically; she heard the sound of her own voice, but she could not hear the words, could not distinguish the sense.

The passionate pain that beat in her pulse, that beat in her head, that seemed to tear overy nerve. What were the words that had aroused him?

"Sin committed while conscience slept."

They beat with merciless strength through her brain; they seemed to burn in the air around her, and suddenly the book fell from her. She burst into such a paroxysm of tears that the earl was bewildered.

"What is the matter?" he asked, angrily. The passionate sobbing went on. "What is the matter, Lady Lynn?" he asked, more angrily still. "You came to read to me to cure a nervous headache, and begin crying yourself in this very foolish womanly fashion. Pray, is there anything wrong?—are you ill or unhappy?"

Oh, Heaven, how weak the words seemed?—ill or unhappy. She was wretched, despairing, and wished herself dead. She turned her weeping passionate face to him.

"May I go?" she cried. "I cannot read. May I go?"

"What is the matter, Vivian? Pray speak out. I suppose that even a woman does not cry in this fashion for nothing?"

"I am tired," she said, and her voice was so full of depression and weariness that he knew there was no pretence about it.

"Then go!" he cried impatiently. "You have health, strength, and spirits to spend a whole evening, but when I want to hear a little reading, you are so tired that you begin to cry."

"I am so sorry," she said, with quivering lips and streaming eyes. Those passionate pulses of pain beat until she could hardly stand.

"You had better go," said the earl, grimly. "This is a fair specimen of matrimony—smiles for the world, tears for the husband. It is considered quite fair, I suppose, Vivian. Good-night."

She was so utterly desolate this night in her sorrow and despair that she could almost have asked for pity and comfort from him. Old, grim, and stern as he was, still he was the only creature living to whom she belonged, the only living human being to whom she was related, and, in her desolation, she could have asked pity even from him.

"Good-night," she said. She paused for one moment, looking at the stern, gray face, at the cold eyes and stern lips. Ah! no; there was no pity, no compassion there; he had bought her with his money and title before she knew what such buying meant. She turned away abruptly; whatever battle she had to fight she must fight it out alone.

"Good-night," she said again; but when she was gone the earl did not feel quite happy; he wished he had been a little kinder: this beautiful young wife of his was, after all, but a child. Why was she crying in that desperate fashion? She could have no troubles of her own. She was crying, he supposed, because some woman had a prettier dress or brighter jewels.

Yet, as she was only a child, and had been shedding such childlike tears, he might have been kinder to her, and he wished he had been; he never dreamed that a woman's passionate love and passionate grief had come to the child-wife, who would be child no more.

He would have been astonished had he seen his wife when she was alone. She dismissed Florette with one of those queenly caprices for which her servants almost adored her.

"I want nothing except to be alone," she said, "and I want no one near me."

Frorette understood the mood and the reason; one glance at the weeping eyes, at the pale face, at the quivering lips.

"It has come," she said to herself. "I have watched it through all its stages: it has come to the last. I know how the tears will end."

Ah, the relief it was for the beautiful young countess to close the door, to fling herself with her face on the ground, and weep out her passionate grief—her terrible pain.

This was love of which they had told her so much—half delicious pleasure, half horrible pain.

"It is all too late," she sobbed, "too late. I have learned

to love him, and I must love him or die; I can never live again without him."

That was just the burden of her tears: she could never live without him.

She wondered as she lay there if every woman must suffer in the same fashion; if love always brought weariness and tears, pain and suffering; if no one in this world was ever perfectly happy. She thought of her young mother, who had asked to die looking on her husband's face, and there sprang up in her heart a sudden understanding; just the same love that prompted her mother to make this request lived in her heart.

If she lay dying—and just now death seemed sweeter than life—that would be the very prayer she would make.

"I should cry aloud," she said. "Oh, heaven, let me see in death the face I have loved best in life; let me die looking in the face of my love!"

CHAPTER XXX.

Sir Lionel walked home that night a wretched man. His eyes were suddenly opened—he saw the brink of the abyss, he saw what loomed before him. "I may thank Heaven," he said, "that I have seen it in time."

He saw plainly that between the gratification of his own vanity and his admiration of the beautiful girl who was another man's wife yet loved him—between the two he was on the road to destruction. Sir Lionel was by no means a bad-hearted man; he was light, reckless, careless of consequences, but he was by no means the type of man who deliberately sets to work to do a wrong thing.

The beautiful, thoughtless words of the song roused his sleeping conscience—set before him in plain truth what he was doing—frightened him, and made him pause in what was a mad career. When he reached his rooms he found a letter awaiting him—a long loving letter from his beautiful wife Elinore.

It lay on the table, and it was to him as though his wife stood there herself, but with no reproaches—with sweet, sad eyes—with a smile more sad than any words, but with no reproach. Every word of the letter was like the lash of a whip to him, just as the words of the song were—so true, so simple.

"The children are well," it said, "and send their love to

you. Gordon grows more like you every day—his eyes go through my heart. We shall be so pleased when you come back, Lionel!"

As he read, the picture of the beautiful trio—the fair wife and the two children—rose before him, and he bowed his head in utter contrition.

He would break with this beautiful, dark-eyed woman who had made him forget Elinore—he would leave her and her witcheries for ever more.

And then the vision of the dark eyes drowned in tears, the remembrance of how passionately she loved him—of how beautiful and desolate she was—of the passionate, loving heart—came to him. She loved him so well—how could he turn away from her, leave her to break her heart in that cold splendor? He must do his duty; fair Elinore was his wife, the mother of his children, the object of his true allegiance; duty, conscience, honor, told him he must return to her and forget Vivian.

He thought of the beautiful eyes to whose pleading he must yield never more; of the white hands he must beat down from him; of the sweet, low voice to which he must listen never more.

And then, as men often are when it is all too late, he repented of what he had done; he would have given the world to undo it; the consequences of our sins and follies reach further than we know; the beginning is so much easier than the ending.

He sat up for an hour or two alone that evening, thinking; there was but one way out of the difficulty, it was true, and that was for him to go at once.

Yes, there was another; but he had not the moral courage to embrace it; if he told her about his marriage, if he spoke of wife and children it would make the greatest difference to her.

He knew that it would at once destroy the whole romance, and twist matters as we may, there can never be the faintest tinge of romance in the love-making of a married man—never!

He tried to screen himself by saying that it would grieve her so, and she had enough to bear; that they were parting and it would not matter. And then his whole heart went to her in wondrous pity. So the morning came on which the beautiful, desolate, lonely woman was to hear her doom. She

was early at the Royal Academy. He saw her seated at the end of the long gallery, and he went to her at once.

"You look very ill, Vivian," he said, gently, for the beautiful face was pale and worn, dark shadows lay under the mournful eyes.

"I have not slept," she said. "Do not speak kindly or pityingly to me, just at first," she said, "I misbehaved myself dreadfully, after you left Glencairn House last evening. The earl wanted me to read to him, and, in the midst of it, I broke down and began to cry; he was so angry."

"Poor child," he said, gently.

But Lady Lynn shuddered at the words.

"You called me poor child," she said, "when I was telling you the story of my life. Never say it again."

"I will not. It is desolate indeed for you."

She laughed a faint, dreary laugh, sadder than any sigh.

"I felt ill this morning and cold, although the day is warm, and desolate, although I have troops of acquaintances and friends. There was no one to say just a few kind words to me no one to sympathize with me, and when I looked at the glass I could not believe that I was either Vivian Lynn, or Vivian whom the good major carried in his arms. It is a great comfort to talk to you."

He knew that what he had to say would not be of much comfort to her. He saw, too, that he could not say it there. She looked so ill and so fragile, in spite of her beauty, he did not dare to say what he had to say there.

"Is your carriage at the door?" he asked.

"Yes" she replied; "I drove here."

"Then let us drive to the park. I thought it would be easy to talk here, but it is not."

She would have gone with him to the end of the world if he had asked her. Soon afterwards they found themselves in the midst of sunlight and green trees.

People cry out sometimes when they are slain, and a death-cry in a Park would not be heard so plainly as one in a picture-gallery. It was here, in the glory of summer sunshine, that he had to slay her. They sat under a great shady tree, and, looking at her lover's face, Lady Lynn knew that he had something it would be difficult to say. He took one of her hands. It was so small, so cold, that in simple kindness of heart he could have taken her in his arms and clasped her to his heart.

"You do not look like the beautiful Vivian, Countess of Lynn, this morning; you are so pale, so silent."

"I do not feel like the Countess of Lynn," she replied. "I always picture Lady Lynn as a brilliant, cold, proud girl; but I, oh! Lionel, I am a woman with my first love and my first sorrow lying heavy at my heart. Tell me, oh! beloved, why did you speak to me in that strain last evening—as if our beautiful love were wrong, as if we must part? It would be kinder to say that we must die."

"That it would, my darling; I know it," he answered,

"We have been so happy, Lionel; I have lived in a new world; everything seemed to grow fair, bright, and beautiful around me. For the first time in my life I have been happy, because I have been loved."

"My dearest Vivian, you seem hardly to understand, and I ought to have opened your eyes, but I have not done so. You see, my darling, it is so different; if we had met in the world free we could have married each other, but now! You are married; love can have no happy ending. We have drifted into the situation blindly, I hope; now we must retrieve ourselves."

"It is too late!" she cried; "I could not give you up. Oh, Lionel, be pitiful to me! No one has ever loved me but you; the very sight of your face, the sound of your voice, the touch of your hand, is to me Paradise. Do you think I could rise in the morning, knowing the sunlight would not bring you, and live? Do you think that I could toil through the long hours of the weary day knowing you would never more break its monotony? Do you think that I can go through years of life, that I can grow old and gray, without you? Better, ten thousand times, for me to die here at your feet. Oh, Lionel! why have I learned to love you, when my love is so utterly in vain, so hopeless?"

"You know what the poet says:—

"'Tis better to have loved and lost
Than never to have loved at all.'"

"Then poets know no pain," she said.

"Yes; for they learn in suffering what they tell in song."

"They are right," she cried, "they are right; the pain is great, but I would suffer double the pain to have had only one hour of the happiness; they are right."

"Vivian," said Sir Lionel, "yours is one of those cases that speak volumes against the present horrible system of marrying for money. No one should marry from any other motive

except pure and honorable love. Marrying for money is a curse, and you have innocently enough drawn the curse on your own head; you married without love and now——"

"And now," she interrupted, "love has come to me."

"Yes," he replied, gravely, "it comes once to every man and woman; there are hundreds of counterfeits, but the real love that makes or mars a life comes once—and once only."

"It has come to me, and has marred mine," she said. "Lionel, what do people do with marred lives? I am one of many thousands of women—I cannot think that my fate differs from the fate of others; at this moment there must be hundreds of girls like myself who have married without love, and have loved all too late—there must be hundreds, at least."

"I am afraid there are," said Sir Lionel, gravely.

"What becomes of them all?" she asked, wonderingly. "What do they do?—how do they fill their lives?"

"I do not know," he replied, "but I can imagine there are some who do the only right thing, and seek comfort where alone it is to be found; others take to flirtations of all kinds—they give themselves up to a life of wild excitement. I have seen some of the fairest women in the world seek refuge in trying to win the heart and entangle the affections of every man they meet!"

"That is a terrible ending," she said, with a shudder.

"Others," said Sir Lionel, "grow wrong altogether; and when they find they have married without love, and love comes upon them afterwards, they lose all sense of right and reason, and the chances are they leave the man they married, and run away with the man they love."

"That is a terrible ending," she said, and her beautiful face wore a desperate expression—"the worst of all."

"Yes," he replied, "the worst of all, because there is no redemption after such a step. Then some take to drinking, and find the only delight in life lies in excessive drink."

"Anything to drown care," she said. "Oh, Lionel, tell me this. I married for money—I knew nothing of love, and now that I am married, love has come to me all too late. I have opened my heart and taken it in. Now tell me, beloved, which of those ways of ending will be mine?"

The dark, sad eyes, the quivering lips, the sad young face touched him.

"I pray Heaven, none," he replied

"Then what remains to me?" she asked. "I can never live as I lived before."

"Listen to me, Vivian," said Sir Lionel. "I would give the whole world to undo what I have done."

"It can never be undone," she cried—"never!"

"Let us look it in the face, and do our best," said Lionel.

CHAPTER XXXI.

"LET us look it in the face," said Sir Lionel; "let us do the best we can; we have almost unconsciously drifted into this state of things; fortunately for us we have come to our senses."

"That is just what I complain of, Lionel," she said, with a sigh that was yet half a smile. "You have come to your senses, but I have not come to mine. I never shall," she added, pathetically.

"Then my sense must serve for both, my darling," he said. "Ah, Vivian, I should not like a shadow on your fair name, a slur on your life, but——"

"But," she interrupted, "I am bewildered; I cannot understand. I do not mean one word of reproach, but you have led me where I am."

He bowed his head and uttered no word. It came home to him in that moment; he knew that he had made his false start from the moment be concealed the fact of his marriage.

"Tell me," she cried, vehemently, "why it is that you have been blind all along, and have just found all this out? I have asked you the question several times, and you have evaded it."

He did not tell her it was because of the same song his wife Elinore had loved, and that, as he heard it, a host of memories rose before him which lashed him like the thong of a whip; he told her that those few words, "Sin committed while conscience slept," had touched him, for he knew that his conscience had been sleeping.

"While you have been my—well—almost my lover," she said, "did you know, or did you think that it was wrong?"

"I have not thought much," he said, "and when I did think I knew it was wrong."

Her face fell, her eyes drooped.

"If you were free," he said, hastily. "and we loved each other, all would be well, but you are not free, my darling, and you have a husband."

He ought to have added, "I have a wife," but he did not and he excused himself on the ground that she would be startled and shocked.

"You see," he continued quietly, "how the case stands with us, we have met, liked each other, abandoned the ordinary rules of prudence, and we have drifted into danger: we are awake to it, and we must change."

"I see," she replied, in a dull, mournful voice, "I understand."

Looking at her he thought of a flower suddenly blighted by frost, the animation, the color, the brilliancy, the very life seemed to die out of her; he was almost frightened at her, she was like a woman turning to stone, still it was better than he had feared; she was quieter, and there were no tears. He little dreamed that her sorrow lay too deep, for tears just then; he was relieved and could go on better, the drooping figure and pale face were strangely still.

"The physician who uses the sharpest knife cures the most quickly," he said, "Vivian, the remedy for us is this: we must part."

The white lips opened, but no sound came from them.

"I have had letters to-day," he added, "which call me home. I must go."

She could grow no paler, nor could her desolation be greater.

"We must bear it bravely, Vivian, it must come; even if I never left London, the earl would take you away, and we should be parted, but I am compelled to go. Speak to me, Vivian."

"I have not one word to say," she replied, raising a face that was ghastly now in its pallor, "not one word, Lionel."

"I believe the old saying is true," he cried, "that our sins turn into lashes and scourge us. Mine have done so. I suffer more than you do, I would give my life—I would suffer torture to undo what I have done—the evil I have wrought. I cannot bear to see you suffer."

"I must suffer," she replied, in a dull voice. "I wish I could die. When shall you go, Lionel?"

"To-day," he replied, in a tone of some hesitation.

"To-day?" she repeated in a voice of despair. "Oh,

Heaven! what shall I do on the morrow?" "We must try, both of us to be reasonable," he said, "and in time, as the years roll on, we may meet again and be good friends."

She only answered him by wringing her hands.

"I shall never forget you, your beauty, your kindness, You will be one of the fairest and sweetest memories of my life."

"A memory!" she cried, "Is that all? Only a memory, and you have been life itself to me! To you it has been a season's amusement—to me it brings death."

"Ah, no, Vivian, you are mistaken; it is more than that. I suffer almost as you do; there has been but little amusement in it. In the future we may be friends. It is better that we should part now."

"The words do not blister your lips as they leave them," she said "They burn my heart as they fall upon it."

"I wish I could bear all the pain and sorrow of it, Vivian," he said, gently.

"A vain wish. I know best what is in my heart. I can hardly realize it yet. We have been all in all to each other; we have met every day; we have spent the brightest hours of the evening together; we have shared the same thoughts and interests: now you come to tell me that we must part. The angels were not hurried so quickly from Heaven. I, like those fallen angels, go out into utter darkness and desolation. The heaven I have fallen from is as dear to me as was theirs to them."

"Time will bring comfort," he said.

"Not to me" she cried. "Never to me."

Then she drew a little nearer to him; her whole soul shone in those dark, beautiful eyes.

"I am to say good-by to you to day," she said, slowly. "Oh, love, must it be good-by?"

"Only for a time," he answered. "In the future, when we can be good friends, we shall meet again."

"Let me look at the face I have loved so well," she said. "Ah, love, for all the joy you have given me I thank you; that you woke my heart from its sleep even if only to fill it with pain, I thank you, for the only gleam of happiness my desolate life has ever known I thank you."

She half rose from her seat, with a moan of pain.

"I am going," she said, "because you have decided that we must part. I am going out of your life away from you, but I am going to torture more terrible than death, and I leave with

you the memory of the wrong that I have suffered. Shall I see you again, Lionel, or is this farewell?'

"I must go to-day——"

"And it would be useless torture," she interrupted, "since it has to come whether it comes to-day or to-morrow. What does it matter? It may as well be now."

She stood before him white, trembling, the wreck of herself.

"Love," she said simply, "teach me how to say 'Good-by.'"

"I cannot my darling," he replied with a sob; "I do not know how."

"Teach me how to leave you,—and how to live without you. Oh, Lionel! you will go perhaps, to other friends; I shall go back to that proud stately home, and—oh, Heaven! how shall I live? If you take up a paper some day and read 'Sudden death of Lady Lynn,' you will know that I have died because I could not live without you—you will know that."

"I pray heaven I may never read such horrible words," he said.

"Lionel," she cried, suddenly, "I ask you again was it fate or Providence which sent me to that ball? Was I sent there that I might suffer this most bitter pain? If it were fate it has surely done its worst to me. Shall you write to me or is our parting to be complete?"

"How ever much I might like it, and however much it might comfort you, Vivian, it would be more prudent not to write, I think. I shall see from the society journals where you are, for a time—all will be different for a time. And now, my dear Vivian, we must say good-by."

Slowly she held out her hand to him—the hand he had kissed and caressed a thousand times; in that supreme moment of anguish no word rose to her pale lips. Slowly she laid her hand in his and let it lie there, while she raised her eyes to his face—and the eyes that had told him so often how much she loved him—now bade him farewell."

No word was uttered: but it was a terrible wrench; it left one heart stunned, and the other breaking. He watched her as she walked away amongst the trees, but he did not see her when she fell faint and trembling on a chair, and cried out: "Oh, God! if there be mercy in heaven, spare it to me now!" Then, what she thought the darkness of death came over her, while Sir Lionel walked away, grieved at heart, but relieved.

"Never," so he swore to himself, would he ever be so

careless again ; never would he encourage the least attempt at flirtation ; never would he "jest with woman more."

This was the first transgression, he said to himself, and it should be his last. Thank Heaven it was over, and over safely. He had said more than he intended in trying to console her ; he had no real intention of renewing their acquaintance ; he had been in the very jaws of danger ; he had been as near a great shipwreck as any one could be, and he was saved ; he thought much of her sorrow and despair, but he thought even more of the fact that he was saved.

He left London that very day ; a man less brave would have shrank from the sight of the fair, pure face there ; when his wife's arms were round his neck, and his children clinging to him, Sir Lionel Rydal did not call himself by any pleasant names.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE first few days of his return were days of great misery for Sir Lionel ; those weeks seemed to him like a dream—a fevered miserable dream from which he had just awoke with a sensation of wonder and shame.

How fair and goodly this home of his was, with its bonnie woods and flowing streams, with its wealth of rich pasture and meadow-land. How fair the stately park spreading out for long miles, with its magnificent trees and its herds of antlered deers, a home that any man might be proud of, the love of which would raise and purify the heart.

How fair the old ancestral home, with its number of art treasures, its brightness and its glow ; and the beautiful wife and the little children, Gordon, with his father's eyes, and the exquisite little girl. Lady Rydal was more than delighted to see her husband again ; his long absence had been a source of great trouble to her. Knowing that it could not be avoided, she had borne it sensibly, but her heart mourned for him. The glamour of first love had not died from the eyes of Lady Rydal ; to her her husband was still a hero and a king amongst men—she welcomed him so royally home, and during those few days she hardly lived out of his presence.

"You are so welcome home, my darling," she would say to

him, one white arm stealing round his neck. "Oh, Lionel, do you know that, beautiful as home is, it is not home without you, I missed you so much; I fancied continually that I heard your voice and saw your face. I have arrived at one brilliant and original conclusion."

"What is that, Elinore?" he asked, wincing beneath the glance of those pure, true eyes.

"Why that 'Love makes home,'" she replied. "I know the old song says that

'Love is Heaven, and Heaven is Love.'

Now I should improve on the old version by saying that

'Home is love, and love is home.'"

She saw no difference in him; her faithful, loving heart saw no change, but she wondered a little why his eyes grew sad and his lips stern. He was thinking of that other home where there was no love, and where a loving, passionate heart was wearing itself away in desolate sorrow, and the thought was bitter to him. This fair, young wife of his was so sure of his love, so sure of his fidelity, and she was torturing him with every kind of question, the white arms folded round his neck, the fair head on his breast.

"Lionel, darling, you have been so long away. Tell me did you see any face in London you like better than mine? I know you did not. I only ask you because I long to hear you say no."

He laid his hand on the gentle head; there was something even solemn in his voice when he answered—

"In all London, Elinore, there was no face so sweet, so true, as yours."

And a vision of the dark passionate face came before him, the eyes so full of love, the lips trembling with passion; just as when talking to Vivian, he had seen the face of Elinore.

"You know, Lionel," she continued, "I have never been jealous of you; when I hear other wives talk about jealousy I do not understand. With perfect love, there can be no such thing; and my love for you is perfect; there is no flaw in it; therefore, I have never been jealous, and never shall be; but when you were away in the evening, and I was by myself with the children, or even sitting quite alone, I used to fancy what you were doing; and when you told me that you were going to

a ball or a party, I wondered what you were doing during that moment in which I thought of you. If you were dancing, round what kind of figure your arm was lying; if you were talking, into what kind of face you were looking; if you were at the opera, in whose box you were."

He shuddered as he listened to the loving, trusting words, but he drew her nearer to him. He did not wish that she should look up into his face lest she should read the unpleasant truth written there.

"And all the time, Lionel," went on the clear voice with its true ring, "with all those fancies I never doubted you one bit. No thought of doubt came to me. I said to myself, no matter whether the face he sees be dark or fair, beautiful or plain, he cares for none but mine. And you do not, do you, Lionel?"

It was a most embarrassing position; they had gone to her favorite spot under the limes, the same spot in which, not many days later on, she read the letter which had been her death blow. He was sitting on the grass and she kneeling by his side. It is to be noticed that men kneel before marriage, women after. She was pouring out to him all the innocent secrets of her heart and soul, her loving thoughts, her tenderness, her devotion to him, expecting the same from him, and he was crushed beneath the weight of his own remorse and self contempt.

"How should I?" he replied, evading the question, and longing to turn the conversation. "I feel almost inclined to ask what you have been doing while I have been away," he said; "you look as young and as fresh as you did upon our wedding-day, Elinore."

"Do I?" she asked, with a happy laugh.

She bent her fair head and kissed him with the protecting fondness some wives show to their husbands.

"Oh, my own," she whispered in a low voice. "It is good to have you back again. You make home, my Lionel; a king's palace or a beggar's cot would equally be home with you Now I must go and see my children."

"And I must go and see my steward. Everything looks in perfect order, Elinore."

"Yes; I do not think you will have one fault to find," she said—"not one. Now, Lionel, before you go, whisper something sweet and kind to me."

He drew her nearer to him with words of murmured fondness; then she looked up at him with laughing eyes.

"Now, Lionel," she said, "I was a good patient wife all the time you were away; I did not hurry you away by one hour, I never teased you about coming home, I wrote you long and loving letters every day, now give me my reward."

"Do you want a reward, Elinore?" he asked.

"Yes, I do indeed. I am entitled to one."

"What is it to be—diamonds—a new set of pearls——"

"No," she interrupted gayly; "something a thousand times more precious. I want a kiss for each day of your absence, nothing less," and he gave them to her.

Was there any reason for Lady Rydal to think that her husband loved her less, cared less for her, or had she any reason to fear that he was going to leave her?

She went away, her innocent heart overflowing with happiness and love—away to her children, to the little girl who inherited her own delicate, dainty beauty, and the noble little fellow who had Sir Lionel's own eyes.

He went away with his eyes fixed on the ground, feeling within himself hatred that amounted to loathing of himself; even the brightness of the sunshine was a reproach to him.

"No man ever had such a perfect wife," he said to himself then those words of Guiniver's would haunt him:

"The perfect king;
But I wanted warmth and color—
So I flew to Lancelot.,'

Yet no—that was not the case with him; he had not flown to Vivian—it was she who had sought him. He was content enough with Elinore, he had never given a thought of his away from her. But the sunlight reproached him: the whisper of the wind, the ripple of the limes, the bloom of the flowers, all reproached him, he no longer stood upright under the skies a loyal, honest man.

"I have been a knave," he said to himself; "and those tender kisses, those loving words of my wife's have stabbed me. I must atone to her for it."

"What a strange thing it is," said Sir Lionel to himself that evening, "that a man may kill anything in the world, but can never kill his own conscience! I wish I could mine."

They had some friends to dinner, and Lady Rydal, who dressed as she lived, to please her husband, looked the perfection of delicate beauty and grace. Her dress was of the palest blue silk, shrouded with white lace and trimmed with white

lilies; with them she wore the magnificent pearls that Mrs. Gordon had given her for a wedding present.

"There is something worth dressing for to-day," she said to her husband, with a charming smile. "When you were away, dress had no interest for me, nor indeed had anything else. You see, Lionel, I belong to the imprudent class of wives."

"Why?" he asked.

"Very wise people, especially very wise old married women, say that the worst thing that a women can do is to let her husband know how much she loves him.

"I do not believe that," he replied.

"Nor do I," she said, and then the pearl necklace was all disarranged and the pearls in the fair shining hair were ruffled, and Lady Rydal did not seem at all discomposed. "Lionel, it is not of much use for me to make a careful toilet, if you treat me in this undignified fashion," but the treatment seemed to delight her very much all the same. They had a pleasant evening, Lady Rydal sang her favorite song—

"Oh, murm'ring trees, oh, fragrant breeze;
Oh, waving, whispering limes!
Oh, there to be again with thee,
My love of olden times!"

Then one of their visitors, Sir Carol Estlin, looking through her music, asked if she would sing the beautiful mournful. "Nothing but Leaves." She had played the prelude before Sir Lionel heard it, and the sound pierced his heart, he went up to her hastily,—

"Pray do not sing that song, Elinore."

"I must dear," she said, "Sir Carol Estlin has asked for it."

"Do not, Elinore," he repeated.

"What excuse shall I make?" she asked; and then he saw how impossible it was for her to refuse.

"I see," he said, gently, "if he has asked you to sing it as a favor, you must, do so,"

But he went away quickly, softly, unnoticed by any one; he could not have stayed to hear it. He went out into the cool fragrant gardens where even the faintest sound could not reach him.

No, there was a limit to human endurance; he could no more have stood to listen to this than he could have flown; the words that had aroused him from his mad dream, that had aroused his sleeping conscience, and brought him face to face with the wrong that he was doing.

"Sins committed while conscience slept."

Oh, Vivian—Vivian! and the dark, passionate face, with its glorious love-laden eyes seemed to creep up to his with that question on her lips—could love so beautiful ever be wrong.

He had not answered her half strongly enough. Wrong, why of course it was; when two meet under the same circumstances as they had done, the right and honorable thing to do was to part.

There was nothing else for it. To linger together is playing with fire, is courting temptation, is playing with danger, is seeking ruin. Yet the beautiful lips that asked the question—how near they had been to his. He was startled from his thoughts, for Elinore stood by his side.

"Are you tired, Lionel?" she asked, gently. "Why did you not want my favorite song?"

The eyes he raised to her were dazed with emotion.

"I did not feel inclined to hear it," he said. "I am tired—I am not well; come to me, sweet Elinore, sweet wife! I ——" and his voice died in the kiss that he laid on her lips.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

Two weeks passed, and the remorse, the regret that had made the first few days of Sir Lionel's return so wretched to him was dying away, that passionate dream was rapidly becoming a thing of the past: he was growing accustomed to the fair tranquil loveliness of his wife, to the beauty of his children, to the grace and quiet of home, he began to think of the beautiful Countess of Lynn as of some one he had known long since. He woke in the night at times with the name of Vivian on his lips, he woke at times dreaming that she was beside him, and that she was pleading with passionate loving words that he would love her, love her even ever so little, and then when he remembered that it was a dream, he would thank Heaven for the narrow escape they both had had.

But so inconstant, so inconsistent is the heart of man, in another few days he found himself thinking of the beautiful, passionate, lonely girl with a great tender pity. If her home were but as happy as his, how glad he would be and as he watched the fair face, the gentle, graceful ways of his own wife, he thought how unendurable the life of the young countess

must be, how stern and cold the old earl was to her with that loving, caressing, southern nature, not having any one whom she could kiss.

Whenever fair Elinore came to kiss him, which happened twenty times each day, he thought of Vivian, flinging her white arms round the old man's neck, and being told "not to do that again."

"Elinore," he asked Lady Rydal one day, "I know you are very sensible, I never knew what a good thing common sense was until I knew you, darling, I want you to tell me one thing, do women ever live happily without love?"

A faint flush rose to her fair face.

"No," she replied, "I think not, nay I am sure not."

"You do not think there are any exceptions?" he asked.

"I do not believe there are," said Lady Rydal, "Love is the one thing in a woman's life; it makes or mars her existence To a man it is more, as the poets say, an episode."

"And do you think, Elinore, that love comes to every woman, happy or unhappy?"

"I am sure of it. It is an integral part of life, and no woman escapes it."

"What become of the women who love unhappily?" he asked her.

"Their lives are spoiled," she answered him, without any shadow of her own coming fate upon her. "I think when a woman once has loved and has been accustomed to love, she can never live without it again any more than she could without sleep, without fresh air, or the necessaries of life."

Then he said to himself—

"If that be the case, Heaven help Vivian."

As the peaceful days wore on, and he became accustomed once more to the fair loveliness of his wife, the beauty of his children, the sweet content and happiness of home, his thoughts returned to the beautiful passionate woman who had given him her whole heart.

He had thanked Heaven for his deliverance from a great danger; he had owned his own imprudence: he had made a solemn vow to himself that never again while he lived would he even in thought be untrue to Elinore; he had resolved to atone for his folly by extra love and devotion to her. Yet, there was nothing he liked better than to take his cigar, ramble about the grounds, and think over all that had passed between himself and the Countess of Lynn.

There can be no doubt af one thing—that nothing flatters a

man so much as the knowledge that a woman loves him. No sweeter incense can be offered than the gift of a heart for which they have not striven. Surprise, quiet self-complacency —wonder at their own power of conquest—overwhelm them.

No words could express the wonder of Sir Lionel when he found that the beautiful Countess of Lynn, the fairest and most popular queen of society, loved him. At first it seemed incredible, then his vanity was immensely gratified. It is wonderful how both men and women enjoy making conquests of each other; indeed, the same instinct runs through creation, down to the hawk, which enjoys the capture and slaughter of the dove.

It was pleasant to walk on the dewy grass amidst bracken and fern, and think of her—of her beautiful face; of her dark, love-laden eyes; of her thousand nameless graces; above all of the grace that distinguished her from a thousand others, her love for him. It was pleasant to watch the light blue rings of smoke rise in the sweet sunlit air, and think of all her passionate words; the cry of the cushat doves in the woods the song of the birds in the trees, the whisper of the wind in the trees, the rustle of the great spreading boughs, the faint music that came from the long, waving grasses, all seemed to repeat her words—"I love you! Oh, love, how I love you!"

Certainly, in a moral point of view, not right, but pleasant at the time and pleasant to remember—sweet incense. So, through these thoughts, a quiet, tender pity came into his heart; he often wondered what her fate would be.

If the old earl would die soon, and she would re-marry, if she would seek in the excitement of flirtation and coquetry for refuge, or if she would, as so many young and beautiful women have done, go wrong altogether. That question was answered for him in the sweet, leafy month of June. He was disturbed one night by a dream of her; he saw her standing by his bedside, crying to him for help, and then vanishing when he went near her.

"I am sure she is in trouble," said Sir Lionel to himself, as he went downstairs.

How fair the morning was: the whole fair, green world seemed to be laughing in the sunlight; the grand old house was full of sunshine and fragrance; the rooms were full of sweet odors from the roses that came peeping in at the windows, from the hay in the distant fields, from the lilacs, all wet with dew. The river was singing in the distance, the birds were singing in the trees, the bees and butterflies were

busy with the sweet white lilies, Sir Lionel's very heart was filled with a great, beautiful content; there was Elinore, fair as the morning, with the hue of a delicate rose on her beautiful face, her morning dress of white with bonnie blue ribbon; on the lawn were the two children; and the sweet, shrill sound of that laughter came to him with the humming of the bees and the song of the birds; a bright glorious morning, and the last real happy day of his life.

He went into the breakfast-room, Elinore's sweet face smiled a loving welcome.

"This is the loveliest day of the loveliest month in the year," she said. "I should like to live out of doors," said Elinore, "today, all amongst the roses."

"The most beautiful part of Dunwold," said, Sir Lionel, "is the limes. I was looking at them this morning; they are the finest in the kingdom, and are just in perfection."

Lady Rydal laughed and said.:

"You know my favorite song—

"'"Tis but the scent of blooming limes,
Blown on some fragrant breeze
That takes me back to olden times,
And to the old home-trees."

"I love that song," she continued, little dreaming that, in the after years, each word of it would be a death knell to her. She went on singing, as her white hands moved softly and gracefully amongst the delicate china—

"'Oh, murm'ring trees, oh, fragrant breeze;
Oh, waving, whispering limes!
Oh, there to be again with thee,
My love of olden times.'"

She paused one minute in her pretty arrangements, and went to her husband; she laid her arm round his neck.

"Lionel," she said, "sad thoughts ought not to come on so fair a morning; but I could not help thinking that if ever I—I lost you, I should never bear the sight or the sound of a lime tree."

"You never will lose me, Elinore," he said, laughingly; and that was the morning of the day he left her.

It was then, while they sat in the sunlit, odorous room, that the fatal post-bag was brought in, and Lady Rydal gave that still more fatal letter into her husband's hands. He did not read it all through in her presence, but he read enough to

let him see that he must go at once; that Vivian was in some terrible trouble, and had appealed to him as the only one in the world who could help her.

Even when he had read every passionate word written there—when the cry from the far distance reached his heart, when he knew that he must answer the appeal made to his manhood—even he had not the faintest thought or dream of then leaving home.

She was young and beautiful, she was passionately in love with him, and she was in bitter trouble. She had called him to her aid and he must go.

No need to trouble Elinore, no need to tell her anything about it. It was all over now, and there was no use in distressing her. But he must go—no man with any sense of manhood within him could resist the cry of help from a woman who loved him. And this was Vivian's letter, although she did not know that it was written to a married man. She would rather have cut off that white, jewelled hand of hers than have written it had she known that.

"Have patience with me, my love," she wrote, "For I am in despair. I am so unhappy, I cannot live. Will you come to my rescue? You said you would if ever I needed you. I need you now—will you come? I cry to you from the depths of my heart; I appeal to the chivalry and manhood within you—I, the woman who loves you with her whole heart, am in sore anguish and trouble. Come to me, Lionel—I pray you, for my love's sake, come without delay!

"I have left Glencairn House, never to return. I am staying at the quiet little hotel at Richmond, the "Royal Arms," where I am known as Mrs. Wylton. I came here last evening, and have a suite of rooms looking over the river. I write at once to you. You will be here to-morrow; you are too truly a knight a gentleman, and a courtier to disregard my prayer.

"The moon is shining on the river, the white clouds sail over the face of the moon, a despairing woman watches both. They say,—for, oh, my heart, all faith lies dead in me—they say that in the blue heavens beyond reigns the great, good Father of all.

"I call him to witness my words, Lionel, my love Lionel.

"If you turn a deaf ear to my prayer—if you harden your heart against me—if you refuse to come to me—just where the moonlight lies on the river shall be my grave. If within twelve hours of my writing this you are not with me, I will drown myself just where the light falls.

"I never spoke in vain; that is my vow, Lionel. You will come; I would rather doubt the mercy of Heaven than your goodness."

And when Sir Lionel Rydal read that letter his mind was divided between two ideas; the first was intense pity for the pretty young Countess of Lynn; the second an earnest desire that he could curse his fate and die!

CHAPTER XXXIV.

YES the young, handsome, wealthy baronet who had everything that heart could desire—that earth could lavish—that Heaven could give, stood hesitating, with a strange oath on his lips, with a strange pain at his heart, with a strange sense of dread and coming evil.

He must go; there was no help for it; if he failed, so sure as the moon shone on the river that night—so sure as the sun shone that day—she would drown herself. He knew that she never spoke in vain; he knew that she would never threaten again; he knew that dire and utter misery must have driven her from her husband's home; he knew that he must go.

She was the fairest woman in the land, and she loved him with a passionate love. She had called to him from the depths of despair, and he must answer her call; but he hated deceiving Elinore; he had wronged her greatly enough; he would have liked to tell her; he would have liked to have taken her with him to comfort and console the hapless girl who had sent for him, but this, he knew, was quite impossible, as Lady Lynn did not even know of her existence. He felt that it would have been a comfort if he could have taken some one with him. He did not like the sole responsibility of that beautiful young girl,

He had not much time to think over matters; the train started at noon; the only thing over which he was quite sure and quite clear was this—that he must go. She would certainly keep her word and drown herself if he did not.

It was then that he kissed the fair face of his loving wife—the beautiful laughing faces of his children; it was then that he looked around at the grand old ancestral home—at the "whispering limes;" it was then that he rode forth from between

the green trees never to return as the same—rode forth to meet a mighty temptation—to lose a well-fought battle—to grasp a shadow which evaded him—rode forth to his doom.

When he was seated in the train he began to consider what course would be wisest for him to pursue—what he should say to her—how he should comfort her. Of course he would return that same evening—he did not care to be so long away from home; home was a man's true refuge. What must he do for the best? As the train whirled along through the lovely green pasture lands, through the hop gardens, past beautiful green hills and old-world villages, he tried to think and plan what would be best.

First and foremost, he would advise her to return to her husband's home—she must go back to the earl, no matter into what trouble she had fallen, no matter what was wrong. As he thought of her, his heart grew very tender and pitful toward her. Poor, beautiful child! under what paroxysm of terror, indignation, or fright had she left home?—what could have happened to her?

She must go back—that must be her first duty. She would perhaps plead and pray, raise a hundred objections, they must be overruled, and in his own mind he began to prepare many arguments for her.

When he reached Richmond he felt some little agitation—there was a spice of romance in the affair, and more than a spice of danger. His heart beat, half with the pleasure of seeing her again, and half with emotion.

"It is something like a chapter from an old romance," he said to himself.

And indeed it was more like that than anything else. There lay the noble, beautiful river, with its green banks, a blue sky overhead—the grand green hill, rising in picturesque beauty—the spreading trees; and there, close to the river, embosomed in rich green foliage, surrounded by tastefully laid-out grounds, stood the "Royal Arms," a pretty, picturesque, old-fashioned hotel. His heart, beat quickly as he went in. He inquired if Mrs. Wylton was there, and the answer was:

"Yes,"

"Was she disengaged?"

"Yes."

"Could he see her?"

"Yes."

Then, with more emotion and deeper agitation than he had felt for years, Sir Lionel followed his guide; he found himself

ushered into a long, low sitting-soom, with a large, old-fashioned bay-window, overlooking a garden full of flowers, a room that had a strong odor of lavender and roses. Lady Lynn was standing in the recess of the bay-window.

He had not thought how he should greet her; he had no time to think now, for before he could utter one word, her arms were round his neck: she was clinging to him with tears, with mad, passionate words, with kisses and caresses; he could not send her away.

"Oh! my love, you have come," she said. "I have counted the hours; I have watched the clock and watched the river; if you had failed me, I should have gone there, but you could not fail. Oh! love, how glad I am to see you! Oh! welcome, welcome! How I have counted the hours."

He might as well have tried to stem the torrents of a mighty tide as to interrupt her; he could not thrust her from him; he could not unclasp the white arms that lay round his neck, and it was perilously sweet, this torrent of impassioned love.

He would have been more than mortal than to have resisted it. Heaven knows, in those unhappy cases, whether woman, the tempter, or man, the tempted, be most to blame. Here, it was most certainly Lady Lynn, but Sir Lionel was equally wrong in listening.

Few men could have resisted her: her beautiful face was flushed, her dark eyes full of love and fire; her red lips parted as she poured out the love of her heart. As he listened, first fear, then self-reproach and right rose in his heart, only to die as they rose.

Then slowly, surely, the loyalty, honor, and manhood died too. Slowly, and surely, the fire that was in her heart reached his; the passion of her words burned him.

He had left home full of good intentions, but all good in him died before the fire of that terrible temptation. The soft, clinging arms, the sweet, clinging lips, the utter abandonment of her love intoxicated him, for there is nothing so devastating, so ruinous, so terrible, as love without honor; it is a tempest that destroys, a fire that burns.

It was not until the very fervor of her words had exhausted her that she ceased speaking; then he looked at her anxiously.

"Vivian," he said, gently "tell me, dear, why have you left home?"

"Do not call it home," she said, "that dull, cold prison-house, it is no home to me. I shall never see it again. I would—I would die in any ditch rather than go back there."

"But my darling," he said, caressing the dark rings of hair, 'what will you do?"

"Stay with you. I wish, oh, Lionel! I wish the old days of romance were back, that I could be your page, follow you to the wars, fight for you, die for you. Let me stay with you; I will be your slave, your servant; I will do anything to serve you, but I cannot leave you. Oh, Lionel, you taught me to love you, you taught me that love was life; you must let me stay with you."

He was, for a time, master enough of himself to ask one question that above all others was important.

"Why have you left your husband's house?"

"I quarrelled with him," she replied.

"What about, Vivian?" he asked.

"About you," she replied: then, again, she clung to him, this time with tears as well as with kisses.

"I have been so wretched, Lionel: I have suffered until I could bear no more. You remember the one hour we spent in the picture-gallery—no, it was not an hour, it was only a few minutes!—some one told my husband of it, that we were together earlier than usual for visitors, and that we drove away together to the park.

"Oh, Lionel, he was so angry; I thought, for a few days, he was very cross and silent, but I was so wretched over you I did not really stop to think about it. I was so benumbed with misery that I believe if any one had cut my arm with a sharp knife, I should not have felt the pain; if a flame had scorched my fingers, I should not have felt it. I did not notice much, only that he seemed to watch me with angry, suspicious eyes. He said to me the day after you had gone,—

"'Is it true that Sir Lionel has left London? Why did he not call to say good-bye to me?'

"'He left his card,' I replied. I was puzzled, Lionel, what to say, for in our bewilderment we had forgotten him altogether.

"'It was not polite, considering what a frequent visitor he was at the house. He was careful enough to say good-by to you, I am told."

"'I do not understand,' I replied.

"'Then I will enlighten your understanding,' he said. 'Sir Lionel Rydal did not call to say good-by to you in your own house. It is just possible that he had that to say which he knew I had better not hear. I am told that the day before he left town he met you, by appointment, at Burlington House,

and that you drove with him in the park. Is it true, Lady Lynn?'

"'Quite true' I answered. 'I met Sir Lionel at Burlington House, and he told me then he was leaving town on the day following. We had been very intimate friends, and we drove into the park, where I wished him good-by.'

"'Why did you not tell me?' he asked, angrily.

"'I did not dream that it would interest you,' I replied, 'or that you would care to hear it.'

"'I care very much,' he said 'so much that I shall insist upon your giving up Sir Lionel's acquaintance altogether. I do not choose that my wife should make herself talked about, and I find, to my intense annoyance, that you have done so with Sir Lionel. You are young and foolish, like all pretty, vain women, Lady Lynn: but he knows the world, and I repeat that he failed in respect when he met you in that fashion.'

"'He has always shown me the greatest respect,' I said.

"'He will show you greater still,' cried the earl, angrily, 'for you will see him no more.'

"Lionel," continued the beautiful, impassioned woman. "Lionel, I am sure I went mad when he said that. You see I had been so miserable over loving you, my heart was still sore with a sense of great loss, and the only comfort that remained to me on earth was this, that I might see you again—at some time see you. Oh! my love! and the words drove me mad.

"'I shall see him when and where I will!' I cried.

"'You shall never meet him as my wife!' he cried. And, Lionel, he raised his hand and struck me."

She showed him a mark like a stain on her fair face.

"I looked at him straight in the face," she continued, and I said to him—'My lord, I *hate* you! And I shall never go back to him."

CHAPTER XXXV.

Sir Lionel Rydal listened without much surprise: this was the usual outcome after such follies; he ought not to feel any astonishment; the wife, married without love finds a lover—the husband grows jealous—husband and wife quarrel—the wife runs away and seeks refuge with the lover; after all, there is a method in such madness.

He was too much a man of the world, he had seen and read

too much to be surprised, but he knew well it was his own fault —it was the result of his own folly.

"When did this happen?" he asked.

"Yesterday," she replied, "although you had left town little more than two weeks. He did not hear it until a few days before, and he did not speak of it to me until yesterday, and then he went away. He was to spend the evening, the night, and part of the next day with some friend he has at Harrow. As soon as he went I came away here. I knew this place because I had heard Major Lester speak about it. He stayed here once, and always praised it as being so pretty and picturesque. I came at once. I am sure that no one will ever think of my being here, and I sent at once for you."

"But, my darling," he said; "you must go back—you must indeed."

"I will die first," she said, with a shudder. "I will never go back to that loveless, joyless home, to that stern, jealous old man who struck me—never!"

All the fire of her warm Southern nature flashed in her face. She flung his hands from her, and stood before him, erect, proud, defiant as a young queen.

"Death is not so hard," she said. "Life in that dull prison with that tyrant is harder. If you have no pity—no mercy for me, death has oblivion."

"I have all pity," he said; "but, Vivian, you do not know, my dear. You have not counted the cost,"

"I do not care enough for it to count it," she cried. "I will pay it, no matter what it may be."

She held up her beautiful head with the proud, defiant grace of an injured queen.

"I belong to a land," she said, "where women disdain to count the cost of love, or the price of a heart. We give grandly we Spanish women, when we give at all. I give you my life."

The beautiful passionate face seemed to flash into his; the dark eyes to burn into his very heart.

"I cannot take it," he cried, carried out of himself; "the life you have belongs to Heaven—and your husband."

"It belongs to you," she cried, with fervor, "to you, and to none else; if you will not have it—no other shall."

"My dearest Vivian, be calm, and think: lay your hands in mine, sweet, and let us think."

Gently as a child she laid those pretty rosy hands in his, and he drew her into the recess of the bay-window, where the

mignonette grew. The very worst thing he could have done; the fire and passion died out of her; she was gentle as a loving, docile child.

"Now, my dearest Vivian," he said, "let us count the cost."

"Count it for me, Lionel," she replied; "it may sound more coming from you. It will seem nothing to me."

"My dear," he said, "do you not understand? Unless you go back to your husband you will lose every advantage you have gained."

"I care so little for them, Lionel," she cried, her beautiful eyes filling with tears. "What advantages are they?"

"Wealth, luxury, title; you are a queen of fashion——"

"With an empty heart," she interrupted.

"You have all that woman's heart can wish or desire; you lose all unless you return. You lose your position as Countess of Lynn."

"I hold it less than nothing," she said, with trembling lips.

"You lose your position, which is that of one of the most brilliant and popular women in England,"

"I care even less for that," she replied. "Oh, Lionel, do you not see that wealth, luxury, magnificence are all less than nothing to me; I want you, only you, out of all this wide world, only you."

"But, my dearest, you are surrounded by a barrier that can never be broken."

"You mean my marriage," she said, with a hot flush. "I have broken that barrier myself—I have left my husband of my own free will, and I shall never go back to him."

"That does not break the barrier, Vivian."

"It weakens it so that another can easily break it. You told me, Lionel, there is no real marriage without love. If there is no love, how can there be any marriage? You told me so, Lionel; and," she went on, with an air of charming simplicity, "if that be true, my real marriage would be with you, whom I love, and not with the earl, whom I do not love."

He groaned aloud.

"Oh, child," he said, "have I been villain enough to teach you that? It is all false—all utterly false and hateful, it is indeed, Vivian!"

"Is it false?" she asked, with a strange smile. "At least I believed it—I could not believe anything else. It does not matter who taught me—I learned the lesson well."

"Listen to me, Vivian," said Sir Lionel. "I have done you

harm and wrong enough. If ever I did teach you the accursed doctrine, you have just uttered, I retract it, I declare it to be utterly false, and I repeat now that the bond between husband and wife is a most sacred one, and can only be broken by death."

The Countess of Lynn laughed a laugh that rang in his ears for many days afterward.

"My bond will be broken by a woman's will," she said—"I shall never go back to my husband. He struck me, and he forbade me ever to see you again."

The gentle submission was dying away, the wild passiou returning.

"You talk to me, Lionel," she said, "of advantages. What are they, when one's heart is cold? I would rather have you to love me—I would rather love you than be queen of the grandest empire under the sun."

"Still you know that in acting after this fashion—in leaving your husband and his home—you set at defiance all the laws and customs of society."

"I care not," she answered.

"I must say one thing more. Do you recognize the fact that you are also breaking the laws of Heaven? I feel bound to set these things before you."

"Yes," she replied slowly. "I am sorry for that. I cannot help it—I shall never go back to him. Oh, Lionel, you love me too much to wish me to do that. Do you think," she added, looking at him with her clear proud eyes, "do you think I could bear a life from which you were shut out; could bear to know that I had to live through a long stretch of years without you? Take the sun from the sky, and earth shall prosper rather than I live without my sun. Can you expect me, now that I have learned to love you, ever to live without you, Lionel?" said the beautiful, guilty, loving woman. "Lionel, I know what I suffered when you went away: I could bear it no longer—bear it no more. I woke in the morning and my day was one long sigh for you; nothing pleased me, nothing interested me, every little thing brought you so forcibly to my mind—the music you liked, the books you had spoken of, even the places in the room, your favorite chair, were all shrines to me, and I the most loving of pilgrims. I could remember the very spot where your hand touched, and I used to kiss them.

"Oh, Lionel, how I love you—foolish love, worshipping love, you will say; it is all true. I could not bear to go where we had been together. I could not bear going to a strange place,

because I had never been there with you, I could not endure to be with those who knew you because the very mention of your name went like fire through my veins. I hated, still more, to be with strangers, because they never mentioned you. The days were so long, I thought they would never pass. Oh, Lionel, you know the old words. At night I cried, 'Would heaven 'twere morn!' At morn I cried, 'Would heaven 'twere night!' I hated the sun, it brought a new day, but it did not bring you; I hated laughter and tears—everything that was not you. I have not slept, food has been like ashes; I could have drank my own tears. Do you think I could live like that? Why death is ten thousand times more sweet. I have tried life without you—no one can say I have not tried—but I cannot live without you. You understand, Lionel."

"I hear, Vivian," he replied, in a grave voice, "I hear what you say."

"And it is true," she cried, with impassioned eagerness, "every word of it is true. I—I have sent for you to tell you so. I cannot live without you, let me stay with you."

By this time, and in the mad excitement of passion, he had as completely forgotten Elinore as though she did not exist; he was carried away, he was out of himself, or now was the time when he could so justly have said,—

"You cannot stay with me; I have a wife and children of my own," but the words did not occur to him. He was blind and dizzy with the horrible temptation.

"I will serve you so faithfully—I will give you my life with all its affection and devotion if you will let me stay."

"There can be no question for your serving me," he said, "if you remain with me," and his face paled with terrible emotion; "we must call things by their right names."

This was not eloquent wooing or even impassioned pleading, but at the first half-word of consent such joy flashed into the face of the girl—such intense, complete, perfect joy—that he looked at her in wonder, and the next moment she was clinging to him with kisses and tears, lavishing on him such love that being merely mortal man, he lost his presence of mind, as he had lost his loyalty, his honor, and his manhood.

"If it is to be," he said, in a voice that he did not recognize as his own, "if it is to be, it is you who must go with me, you understand, Vivian?"

Abandoned in that terrible moment by every good angel, she murmured,—

"Yes, I understand; I know what I am losing and what I

am gaining—I prefer the loss to the gain. I will not go away from you again, and if you send me from you, it will be to death."

"You love me so much," he said, "that you are willing to sacrifice everything in the world for me."

"I wish the sacrifice were greater," she murmured.

"You give up wealth, luxury, and magnificence, for I am not wealthy as the earl is; you give up home, title, position, and all for my sake."

The very madness of passion must have been upon her, for she answered,—

"Yes, and I would give up more if there were more to renounce. I would give my life if I might die looking at you and loving you—my life itself."

And she remembered in that moment two things—how her young mother had asked to die looking on her husband's face, and how she had remembered that fact as she stood before the altar with the earl. She loved this man, for she felt as her young mother had done when she was dying; even death was sweet if she could look upon him.

Then all efforts at honor or loyalty ended. Their good angels, with veiled faces, retired; and two more souls drifted down the stream that begins where roses bloom and ends in the flames of eternal fire.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

An hour later, and every arrangement had been made; Sir Lionel felt like a man whose senses have been dazed by a cold shower-bath; he was carried away by the wild love and wild passion of the moment; he lost all count of time and honor; he remembered only that the most beautiful and most passionately loving woman in England had flung herself at his feet, and had taken possession of him.

When the glamour of passion falls over man or woman, they are lost to everything in the world—but themselves.

"Where shall we go?" asked Vivian. "Oh, Lionel, how I long to fly away from all this; steam will not be fast enough. Love, let us go to a land of roses; they say—the poets who sing of love—that,' it flourishes best where roses grow.' Let us go there."

In the passionate abandonment of her happiness, she never

gave one thought to what she was leaving. Sir Lionel did, and even in the mad whirl of passion he saw plainly where he stood and what he was doing.

Lady Lynn had decided their route; they were to go to Italy, where, beside the roses growing, the "nightingales all sung." They would leave London that evening for Dover, catch the night mail for Calais, on through France to Italy. Her dark eyes were shining like great stars; her beautiful face was flushed. She looked so royally beautiful, yet so bewitchingly tender, that he was dazed. She knelt with her hand on his breast, one white arm resting on his neck.

"Let us go, love," she said, "to Italy, and visit all the places where the sweetest love-stories have been told. Let us go to Verona, where Romeo loved Juliet; I will be Juliet to you. Let us go to Venice, where sweet Desdemona died, but I shall never be Desdemona to you. Let us go where Tasso sung and Dante prayed. We will not live in a dull prosaic world at all; we will live in a beautiful world of poetry and romance!"

And the unhappy girl actually for the moment forgot that the foul canker of sin would darken the fairest world.

"You shall take me to Spain," she said, "to the spot where my father died, among the hills of Galenza."

He looked at her in sheer wonder. On the beautiful face shone a great light, the light of fervor, passion, and enthusiasm. She seemed to have lost sight of wrong altogether.

"We will go to the pretty little cemetery where my mother lies buried—my mother, who hardly saw me. I shall kneel down by her grave, love, part the long grasses, and whisper to her that I am happy—so happy! for I have found some one to love just as she loved my father."

"Hush, child, for Heaven's sake!" he cried.

The loving words were terrible to him. She spoke of her love as though it were holy and blessed, instead of thinking of it as it was—an accursed crime. She looked at him in wonder.

He replied to her look, for she spoke no word.

"Do you not see? Ah, well, it is useless to speak of it, but, Vivian, if that sweet young mother and that brave father of yours were living, what would they say to us?"

A scared, distressed expression came over her face, for one half moment, then she said,—

"You shall not spoil my happy hour, Lionel. This is the hour in which I have won you—it shall not be saddened. Do you know why I say these things to you? Because, except the

major, you are the only creature living to whom my heart opens. I cannot help speaking to you of my mother and father. I know that you will indulge me in every wish."

To her there was no longer fear, dread, or reproach—nothing but the full certainty of love.

It was with her beautiful head on his breast, and her arm around his neck, that she laid all their plans for a brilliant sin-stained future. She was so wonderfully, so unutterably happy, that his surprise and infatuation grew deeper every moment.

At length he left her: they must make some preparation for flight. When he rose to go she clung to him with detaining hands.

"I am almost afraid to let you go," she said: "I am almost afraid to trust you out of my sight."

"You need not fear," said Sir Lionel. "There must be no looking back now; it is too late. Our fate is cast together for life and in death."

"I knew it was *fate* that brought us together, and not Providence, as you seemed to think, Lionel," she said, triumphantly. "Oh, love, if I let you leave me, make haste back!"

"We must be ready to start in two hours," he said. "We need not trouble ourselves with much luggage; a portmanteau for me, and a lady's travelling trunk for you, and we are ready. I shall be back in two hours for you, Vivian."

He left her; he would not think; he would not, dare not, look at the future: he lived in the mad excitement of the present moment. The most beautiful, the most loving woman in Europe had flung herself at his feet. He was carrying away with him that night the lovely young countess who had ruled all hearts and all men. She, from the high estate of magnificent beauty, had stooped to him, had broken through every barrier that heaven, and earth, and womanhood had ever framed, to reach him. Had ever man been flattered, honored glorified by such love before? Was there ever love so grand, so generous, so devoted?

And then, as though a spectre stared him in the face, he thought of Elinore.

Too, late now—too late to think of the little children; he was under a spell—enchained, infatuated, yet with a perfect knowledge of the wrong he was doing.

He went into one of the nearest hotels and deadened what might have been an acute sense of regret by taking a bottle of champagne, and under its influence he wrote the letter which had so nearly killed his wife.

His heart and soul were on fire with a great and guilty love; his heart beat: his brain reeled; his hand trembled so that he could hardly hold his pen; every nerve and every pulse thrilled again; the great, guilty passion that had taken possession of him seemed to thrill in the air—seemed to burn in the sunlight.

Yet, as he wrote, and the fair, pure face of his wife rose before him, he shrank with unutterable dread from what he was doing; all the sin and the shame of it came over him. He was reckless, impulsive, and impetuous; but he was in reality too good a man ever to be a great sinner, or ever to be quite happy in wrong-doing.

As he wrote, he realized what he was doing—that he was leaving the best, the most faithful and devoted wife who had ever lived—that he was leaving her in the most cruel and deliberate fashion—that he was deserting the little children whom he had loved so well. It came home to him that one truth—that he was playing the part of a pitiful, abject coward. He knew that he was leavingthe brightest, best part of life; and when he wrote those words, "I go out into the darkness of death," they were true; for to denounce honor and loyalty, is death; to court dishonor is death; to live a life of sin and shame is death—so he had gone out to the dark of death.

His hand trembled when he sealed that letter. "My doom!" he said to himself, with a reckless laugh. "How little I ever dreamed that a beautiful woman would be my doom! How many dreams of evil omen had she before she came to that ball!"

He sent the letter off at once, and then resolutely shut his eyes. He would not follow it: he would not think of the fair face bending over it—of the loving wife shot through the heart by his cruel words.

He found Vivian ready, waiting for him, her beautiful face just a little pale, her eyes full of wistful love.

"Lionel," she said, "I am just a little frightened; be very kind to me."

And the meekness touched him more than the passion had done.

"I will be more than kind, love," he answered. No need for reticence in words; he had burned his ships: there could be no going back.

"Good-by, Elinor, goodby for evermore," he had written, "good-by, Elinore," he had said in his heart. It was over and

done with, the past, pure, beautifull ife ; let him make what he could of the future.

" Love, be kind to me," she whispered, and he took her in his arms and swore eternal fidelity to her. Her heart beat and her face was pale.

" Oh, Lionel," she cried, with a sudden tremble, " what lies before us ? "

" Love," he answered ; and with that one word he drew her from the room, led her down the great staircase, placed her in the carriage, and ordered the coachman to take them to London Bridge.

" It is done," she said, laying her hand over his.

" It is done," he answered, and in his own heart he added, " Heaven only knows the end."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THERE had never been so fair a sea ; there are times when the Channel lies calm as a deep blue lake, and this was one of them. A dark sky studded with golden stars ; a brilliant moon, the light of which seemed to throb with the seas ; strange shadows from the passing clouds that seemed to dance over the silent waters ; silvery gleams of light that shone and glanced on the sea.

The steamer had left the white cliffs far behind, a cool, calm breeze barely rippled the surface of the water, and the " Princess Beatrice " left behind a trail of silvery foam.

The moon shone bright as day ; the blue of the sky, the silver of the sea, the dark figure of the stately vessel stood out in bold relief.

There were not many passengers that night on board the " Princess Beatrice " ; an invalid lady had gone below, several were sleeping, the beauty of the soft, starry night, all dead to them, others were pacing the deck. Two were quite alone, they were leaning over the side of the deck, watching the water—a tall, handsome man with a fair face, with just a shade of sadness in his blue eyes, a beautiful girl whose face in the moonlight was exquisite, and whose dark eyes were bright as the stars in the sky.

They stood side by side in the moonlight, and suddenly with a beautiful blush, she raised her face to his.

'Let me tell you my love," she said, "in some words sweeter than my own. Listen, Lionel,—

'If love were what the rose is,
And I were like the leaf,
Our lives would grow together,
In sad or singing weather;
Blown fields or flowerful closes,
Green pleasure or gray grief;
If love were what the rose is,
And I were like the leaf.

'If I were what the words are,
And love were like the tune,
With double sound and single,
Delight our lips would mingle
With kisses glad as birds are,
That get sweet rain at noon;
If I were what the words are,
And love were like the tune.'

"Are not those words sweeter than any of mine, Lionel?"

"No, none could be so sweet," he replied.

"Listen again, Lionel. The moon inspires me. I can do nothing but quote poetry to you to-night.

'Shall we not laugh, shall we not weep?
Not we, though this be as it is,
For love awake, or love asleep
Ends in a laugh, a dream, a kiss,
A song like this.'

"Now, Lionel, there is a sad prophecy this sweet June night, sad as the sobbing of the little waves round the boat:

'For love awake, or love asleep
Ends in a laugh, a dream, a kiss.'

"If ours ever ends at all—and it must not end, Lionel—if it does, I hope it will be in a kiss, and if it were ended, I should like to die as you kissed me. Suppose we were drowned together now, you and I—that we were to sink down—down through the clear green waters; if I were folded in your arms, I should not call it death."

And he wondered, as he listened, at the depth of love in that loving, misguided heart.

"We are going to seek love in the land of roses," she said, She drew nearer to him.

"Does the moonlight, and the stars, and the sweet air that blows, and the green waters, make you love me more, Lionel?" she said.

"Yes," he replied.

"'Love me, sweet. with all thou art
Feeling, thinking, seeing:
Love me in the lightest part;
Love me in full being.
Love me with thy voice that turns
Sudden faint above me;
Love me with thy blush that burns
When I murmur—"Love me!"

'Love me with thy thinking soul,
Break it to lovers singing;
Love me with thy thoughts that roll
On through living, dying.
Love me in the gorgeous "airs"
When the world has crowned thee,
Love me kneeling at thy prayers,
With the angels round thee.'

"Now, Lionel, are not those sweet words? I think this moon will inspire me to almost anything. How calm and sweet it is! I shall never forget the beauty of this night and this poetry. I have another, yet another, beautiful song for you; one from the 'Last Days of Pompeii.' Do you know it?"

"No," he replied, thinking that the stars and the moon light, the beautiful face by his side, the lovely lips overflowing with poetry, were all very pleasant.

"Such a lovely little song, Lionel," she said, and there was a ripple of music in her voice, as she repeated the lines—

"'The wind and the beam loved the rose,
And the rose loved one;
For who recks the wind where it blows,
Or loves not the sun?

'None knew where the terrible wind stole,
Poor sport of the skies
None dreamt that the wind had a soul
In its mournful sighs.

'Oh, happy beam! how canst thou prove
That bright love of thine?
In thy light is the proof of thy love,
Thou hast only to shine.

'How its love can the wind reveal,
Unwelcome its sigh;
Mute, mute to its rose let it steal,
Its proof is—to die.'

"You see, Lionel," she went on, in a voice sad and sweet as the wind sighing over roses, "you see, that the proof of all love is death."

"My darling, do not use the word—on this night above all nights—do not use it. As much poetry, as much romance, as you like, but we will not have the name of death."."

"I wish," said Vivian, whose fancies were all astray that evening—"I wish that we could go on sailing in this way forever, and never stop. I wish there was no shore, but a great, limitless sea. I am frightened at the shore, Lionel—I wonder why?"

But he, just at that moment, had gone in his thoughts to Dunwold, over which the dark shadow of a terrible tragedy hung. He was picturing the faces of wife and children there—he hardly heard the words she was uttering. He wondered where Elinore would be when she received his letter—he wondered if she would gather the children in her arms and tell them. He hardly realized in that moment of glamour and intoxication that he had renounced wife, children, and home forever. He was thinking intently, and Vivian looked up in his face.

"Lionel," she asked gently, "of what are you thinking? I have spoken to you three times, and you have not heard me. I shall be jealous of the water and the moonlight if they take your attention from me; I cannot spare it—I cannot spare one glance at your eyes, one word from your lips, one thought from your heart—I must have them all. Tell me of what you were thinking—let me share the thoughts, and then I will be content."

You can see the picture, reader—the dark sea, with the strange lights and gleams that night and the moon always throw on it; the steamer standing out clear and distinct under the light of the sky, the moon shining bright as day: the two, standing on the deck, watching the roll of the waves, both faces so beautiful; the two so guilty flying from home, flying from honor and all that makes life most dear, wrapped in a dream of passion from which they will too suddenly awake.

You see the picture in its beauty and in its guilt—the girl, her heart beating with passion, with the novelty of the situation, with love, and a tinge of fear—the man, carried out of

himself by the glamour of her beauty and the witchery of her love.

You see the picture—the moon shining on a scene of folly and guilt, the boat gliding over the quiet sea, when suddenly the storm-cloud falls and there is quiet and peace—no more.

"Tell me," repeated Vivian, "of what you are thinking? Ah, Lionel, how beautiful to talk to you at ease, without fear, without the dread that some one is watching us. I wish, with all my heart, that we could sail on and on forever."

He looked at her with the half-consciousness of one roused from a deep thought who had hardly grasped realities.

"Lionel," she cried, half impatiently, "where are your thoughts?"

"I beg your pardon, Vivian," he said, dreamily. "I did not hear. I was thinking——"

"Of what?" she interrupted, so quickly that the next words seemed to be caught from his lips.

"Of my wife and children!" he answered, forgetting, for the moment, everything except that she had spoken and he must reply; forgetting that he had studiously concealed from her the fact that he had a wife—speaking, as people do speak at times, without reflection and without thought, dropping unconsciously, as it were, the very words they would give a life to unsay.

He did not, just at first, see its effect upon her, nor did he at first realize what he had done; the dreamy, musing mood was still upon him; then slowly he became aware of the fact that she was looking at him with a white, dazed face, out of which two startled, frightened eyes were looking in his own.

Whiter even than the pale moonlight—whiter than the snow that lies so lightly and so softly—whiter than the leaf of a lily, was the face raised to his. Slowly consciousness came to both of them; slowly, as one who has been thought dying recovers life—slowly, surely they realized the truth; he, that he had revealed a secret, well hidden,—she, that her lover had a wife and children. It seemed to her afterwards that, as she stood before him in the moonlight, she received her death wound.

"Your what?" she asked, and her lips, that had grown so white and rigid, unlocked with difficulty.

"Your what, Lionel?"

Then he saw what he had done. He had kept from her the fact of his marriage, first from a weak, foolish, sentimental idea that it would spoil a pretty romance; and afterwards,

because he did not wish her to know, lest it should take from the admiration and love which were pleasant incense to him.

Setting aside the wickedness of his conduct, the weakness and folly of it had been quite as great. He realized that now when he stood looking in that white, beautiful, startled face; in his own mind he said to himself that he had been weaker than the weakest.

The white moon shone on, the beautiful figure swayed to and fro. He caught her hands.

"Vivian, darling," he said.

She looked at him with a strange smile.

"I have heard of people going mad under the light of the moon," she said. "Do you think that has happened to me?"

And laughter that was horrible to hear startled the silence that lay over the restless sea.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

"MAD!" she repeated, with a laugh that, strong as he was, made him shudder. "I never thought I should go mad; it must be the fault of the moon, the moon is not to be trusted, it steals the light from the eyes of men when they sleep under it, it steals the brains of women, weak—oh Heaven, weak as I——"

He looked at her in wonder and fear. Accustomed to the calm self-control of Elinore, he could hardly understand this impassioned, impulsive, reckless nature. It was new to him; he was half frightened at her. If she was startled to hear of Elinore and the children, why should she talk about the moon? He did not recognize the fact that after the terrible strain and tension of heart, mind, and brain, the sudden reaction was too much for her, and for a time at least the balance of her mind was gone—only for a few minutes, but they were unutterably horrible to him while they lasted. He took her hands and held them tightly clasped in his own.

"Vivian, my darling, listen to me," he said. "You frighten me; be calm, be reasonable—you will be ill if you do not mind."

"Better ill than mad," she cried—"better anything than

mad. It is the moon, the moon; it lies on my head like lead —the white, cold, cruel moonlight? Some one told me years ago that I should die under the light of the moon."

He drew her gently to the seat by the railing, and forced her to sit down; he saw that mind and brain were reeling under the terrible shock, that the only thing to do was to give her perfect rest and quiet. He drew her near to him, and laid her face on his breast, so that she could not see the moon.

He soothed and hushed her as though she had been a child and in that hour when her weakness appealed to his strength, he cared more for her than he had ever done before, or ever would again.

He raised her face, and kissed the white, dark-fringed eyelids.

"You shall not see the cruel moon," he said; "you shall see nothing but the face of one who loves you," but, with a shudder she hid both face and eyes on his breast again. "Vivian," he said, gently, "speak to me. I—I am nervous about you, you look so strange, speak to me!" She raised her head then, and looked at him. He saw that the wild light had, in some measure, died from her eyes, and that reason was returning. "My darling Vivian, do not look up,—rest; you are tired, and the strain on your mind has been great—rest."

"No, I do not require rest," she replied, "I—oh, Lionel, what was it you said which frightened me so? that made me fancy I was mad: something—what were the words?"

And a hungry, eager light came into the dark eyes, as though she would tear the words from his lips if he did not repeat them. Even in the moonlight she saw his face flush crimson; he looked embarrassed and unhappy.

"You mean," he said, slowly, "my wife and children, those were the words that startled you."

She repeated them slowly.

"Your wife and children," she said, "Oh, Heaven, have I heard and spoken aright?—your wife and children! I swear that I believed you loved no one in the wide world but me."

He tried to say that he had never done so, that he loved her best in the world, but even in that moment he could not utter the words.

"I thought," she went on, in that low, despairing voice from which all hope had died—"I thought that you had never wooed or loved any woman but me."

Her white, despairing face drooped from him; she hid it with her hands.

"Vivian," he said, "you should not take it in this fashion, my dear; if I have left a wife for you, you have left a husband for me."

"It is quite different," she cried, with passionate, eager misery—"quite different. I did not love my husband; he is old and stern and angry with me. It is quite different. I did not love him, he does not love me. There was no wooing with us, I never kissed him but once—only once. And you!—oh, Heaven! speak the truth to me—the truth—even should it kill me—did you love this woman who is your wife?"

Let him answer "no," if he dare, while Elinore's fair face and tender eyes rise before him as they looked when he wooed her under the limes—as they looked when Gordon lay, an hour old, in her arms, and he had gone to see mother and child!

"Did you love her?" repeated Lady Lynn; and there is something in her voice that compels him to answer. Wicked, foolish, weak and vain as he is, he does not sully his soul with another lie, but answers,—

"Yes."

And for one moment it seems to the hapless girl that he has stabbed her to the heart."

"You loved her!" she cried—"loved her! I thought—oh, Heaven help me!—that you loved no one but me. Did you woo her and love her, and live happily with her, as other husbands do?"

"Yes," he replied.

And again she recoiled as though he had given her a mortal wound.

"Do you know what I believed?" she asked, all her desperate misery written in her face. "I believed—listen, Lionel—that I was the first and only woman you had ever loved, ever cared for, ever wooed."

"But, Vivian, be just, I never told you so."

"No, I know that—I know that you never said it in words, but I believed it. I thought you had never kissed any other woman's face, or held another woman's hands as you held mine Do you think I should have loved you if—if I had known this shameful truth?"

"Why more shameful in my case than in yours?" he asked wonderingly.

"It is so different," she answered, and even in that most desperate moment he was struck with a certain grand simpli-

city—"so entirely different. I would not have deserted little children. I would not have run away from any one I loved. I have left my husband because I was so miserable and because I loved you so much, and this—on, Heaven!—is my punishment. Did you," she continued fierce passion flashing from her eyes, "did you ever kiss her, caress her, as you have done me?—I, who believed you had kissed no other face."

Let Elinore answer for him and tell how his caresses had been her greatest comfort!

"Yes, I did, Vivian," he answered, slowly. "I may as well tell you the truth. I loved her very much indeed."

It was only another blow from which she shrank, shuddering.

"You loved her, wooed her, and took her home?" she said, slowly.

"Yes; it is true," he answered.

"And I thought that you had never uttered one word of love to any woman—save to me!"

"Vivian," he said, gently, "why did you believe that? It was never discussed between us; you never asked me if I had cared for any one; you never asked me if I had loved or married."

"I never thought of it," she replied. "From the moment I saw you until now, you have seemed to me so entirely mine that I never realized or dreamed you might belong to any one else. I noticed that you never paid any attention to any lady—that you did not care for the beauties. I—I—thought that you had only eyes for me."

"I ought to have told you," he answered, "but after I found out that you liked me, the truth is, my vanity forbade it."

"Your vanity," she replied. "You have broken my heart to please and gratify your vanity. Oh, Heaven! my punishment is greater than I can bear. I thought, after all," she continued desperately. "that perhaps—my—my— running away with you was not so dreadful after all, that we might be married, and in a few years' time all would be well; but I did not know when I thought that, that you were married, that you had wife and children; how was I to know it?"

"Vivian," he whispered, "is it nothing to you that having wife and children I am here?"

"No," she answered, "it is nothing now. I wonder," she went on, in a voice of dull pain, "how it was that no one knew it—no one ever spoke of it, no one ever told me that you were married."

"I wonder also," he replied. "I never tried in the least to keep my marriage secret; the only explanation I can give is this—that your circle and mine, in London, were different; amongst my few friends, people without doubt unknown to you, the fact was well known. Amongst your friends it was not known and not thought of. I am too insignificant to be of any importance in a circle like yours. Another reason why my marriage was never discussed may be this, that my —my wife—has never been London in; her father is simply a country squire of whom London has never heard."

"The daughter of a country squire," she repeats; "a country girl, then, sweet, innocent, simple, the very opposite of me. I am a worldly woman; in your eyes, perhaps—ah me! —perhaps a wicked woman, and she—she is all excellence."

"We will not discuss her, Vivian." he replied. "She is a queen; she is fair, tall, stately, with a charm——"

"You are torturing me," she cried, suddenly; "do you not understand that you are torturing me? Every word is a burning sword in my heart."

And he felt that he was needlessly cruel.

"We will not discuss her," he said, slowly. "Vivian, I am true."

"Lionel, tell me one thing more. Why, if you had a wife and children at home, why did you come to London alone, and why did you remain so long?"

"I came on business," he replied, "business that was essential. My wife could not go with me; she could not, and would not, leave the little Blossom."

She laid her hand on her heart with the gesture of one mortally wounded.

"Stay," she cried, "one moment; let me breathe. My heart beats so, that it will kill me. Stay!"

She stood leaning over the rail of the steamer, watching the waters below, while the storm his few words had aroused passed over; then, when she had ceased to tremble, ceased to weep, she turned to him again.

"You have told me why you have came," she said; "Now will you tell me why, with wife and children at home you remained?"

"Yes; I can more easily answer that question. I remained for you—with you, not at home with her."

"I have lost my faith in you," she cried, "and I believed in you more than I believed in Heaven. You are to me no longer Lionel my lover, my all in the world, you—are a mar-

ried man. I have loved you with the wildest worship woman ever gave to man, but I did not know that you belonged to some one else; I loved you, I was miserable in my own home, but I should never have gone away with a married man." And then the hopeless girl broke down with bitter tears and bitter sobs. She seemed to fall from his arms and she leaned her head against the railing so that she could neither see the moonlight nor him, and then she wept—Heaven save us from such tears.

He knew it was impossible to stop that tempest of bitter, passionate tears.

"If you had only told me, if I had only known," she sobbed. "I have lost my faith in you; I must always love you, my love is my doom, but my faith is dead—how could you deceive me so? I trusted you, I hid nothing in the wide world from you, I told you the deepest secret of my heart, and you kept from me the most important thing in your life It was cruel—cruel."

And the sobs of the weeping girl seemed to rhyme with the ripple of the waves as they rose and fell.

"I do not see the end of this," thought Sir Lionel to himself; "the only thing I can see clearly is this, that I have been the greatest coward and the greatest knave."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

"VIVIAN," said Sir Lionel, "let me say something to comfort you; I cannot bear that you should weep in that fashion; I feel as though I had murdered you."

"You have," she replied. "I could have lived on in my misery with the old earl; I cannot live now. Oh! why did you not tell me at first, when I was learning to love you? before my doom was fixed? while I had control over my heart and myself? Ah, how different it would have been. I should have felt grieved and unhappy for a time, but my better sense would have helped me, and I should have torn myself from you before it was too late—too late," and the words seemed to die on the moonlit waters.

"I loved you," she went on, with passion deepening in her eyes—"loved you; but I am a woman. I would not have taken another woman's husband from her; I would not indeed. That

was not my dream, my ideal, the husband of another woman. I thought that some one would love me first, best; that I should win the love of a fresh, unspoiled heart. Oh, better ten thousand times my life with the earl, unloved and wretched, than this farce, this playing at love! How could you care for me, when you had loved a beautiful woman whom you took home, your wife, the mother of your children? How could you? Oh, Lionel, how could you?"

"Vivian," said Sir Lionel, and this time the tears stood in his eyes. "I despise myself. No man was ever a greater coward that I have been. But, my darling, since we have both left home since you have left husband and I have left wife—why reproach me?"

"You will never understand me," she replied. "All words are useless. You cannot understand—side by side with my great faults—that I have too much that is noble in my heart to allow me to rob another woman of her lover. Oh, Lionel, you are not mine—not mine, after all! Tell me one thing more—does she love you, this woman you call a queen, your wife? Tell me" she cried, in a low voice, that died in a faint gasp on her lips. "Did—does she love you very much?"

"My dearest Vivian, why do you torture yourself—and me?" he answered.

"I must know," she cried. "I must know, Lionel. You must tell me—does she love you?"

"I—I—know she does," he replied.

"Then," she said, rising from her seat and snatching her hand from his, "may Heaven forgive me if I have broken the heart of a good woman."

The words died on her lips, for they were at Calais, and the steamer lay alongside the pier; some of the passengers had already begun to make preparations for disembarking.

"This is Calais, Vivian," said Sir Lionel. "We have half an hour before the mail train starts for Paris. You will have some soup, some wine, will you not?"

"I could not touch either. Listen to me, Sir Lionel. I cannot go on by the mail train; I must talk to you; I can say all that I need in one short half-hour. Come and walk down to the sea with me; let the moon and the waves listen, no mortal ears must hear. Come with me, Lionel."

There was nothing else for it; he could make no excuse, as he felt half inclined to do, about the luggage—that was registered and would go on to the Hotel Meurice in Paris. He shrank from the lonely *tete-a-tete* on the Calais sands. The

moon shone with a brighter light than it had done when they set sail ; the sea was like a mass of molten silver ; the wind faintly stirred the waves, and the sands shone in the light of the moon. They passed the Quai, and turning from the town they went down to the water's edge ; the tide was at its height, and the waves broke languidly on the shore.

She was pale and silent ; she looked like one whom a sudden shock has brought suddenly to her senses, who had been brought from the delirium of fever and passion to the cold chill of reason.

" The sea looks like a large grave to-night," she said, " and, oh, Lionel, in that grave lie buried my youth, my hope, my love, my life. I will forgive, no other words of reproach shall pass my lips, if you will tell me why you hid this fact of your marriage from me."

" I was a child. I have no excuse, but this most weak and unmanly one ; I thought if you knew it, you would admire and like me less."

She was silent for a few moments, then she said,—

" Your reason was founded first on your own vanity, than on your affection for me. You knew that, faulty as I am, I would not rob a woman of a husband whom she loved. And you would have missed the incense of my love. Was that it ? "

" The action is contemptible enough," he replied, " but it is true."

" I understand ; and since I sent for you, you have not recovered the calm of your reason sufficiently to think of telling me ? "

" No," he cried, with eager haste—" no, the words were quite accidental. I should not have told you so hurriedly—perhaps not at all if I had thought of my plan of action."

They were quite alone by the light of the moon, and there was no sound save the faint rush of the waves, as they broke and died on the shore.

She was calm now, and the grandeur of a great sorrow lay upon her white, beautiful face.

" Lionel," she said, gently, " I told you once that nothing touches my heart like a little child. I love little children—tell me about yours."

" What am I to tell you ? " he asked, with an embarrassed face.

" What they are like—how much you love them—how much they love you—what you call them."

"I would rather not," he replied. "It is useless torture for you and for me. I have left my children for you, Vivian."

"It will comfort me afterwards," she said gently "Do tell me Lionel, are they like you?"

He spoke reluctantly with the manner of one from whom the words are forced.

"I have a little son who is like me," he began.

She interrupted him.

"A little son!" she cried, "and I, oh, Heaven, my arms are empty, my heart is empty! I—I did not mean to interrupt you," she added, gently, "tell me, that I may remember all about your little son."

"We called him Gordon—that is the squire's name," and as Sir Lionel spoke, all the home figures rose before him like spectres of a happy past that could never return. "He is like me—so they say—he has eyes so like mine that his mother declares they are identical; he has a lovely, laughing, little face, and is the most clever of boys, a little prince, adored by everybody for his proud, imperious ways. I would rather not speak of my boy," added Sir Lionel, with tears in his eyes.

"You love him so well," she said, gently.

"Yes, so well. Whenever he saw me, he would run to me calling out, 'Papa! Papa!'"

"And you have left him for me?" she said.

He thought to himself that it was rather she who had taken him away, who had charmed, fascinated and ensnared him, but he was not cruel enough to say so.

"I have left all the world for you," he said.

"I shall remember the little Gordon, with a fair face, and shining rings of golden curls," she said. "It will be a memory in my heart; he runs after you and calls you 'Papa.' I shall remember."

There was such hopeless, utter anguish in her voice that he was deeply touched for her.

"Why do you make me tell you these things, Vivian?" he asked.

"They are a sword in my heart just now,—only just now,—afterwards they will be memories to me; tell me more, tell me of the other one, I shall know little Gordon."

"The other is a beautiful little girl with a face just like her mother. The old Squire would have her called 'Victoria,' after the Queen; we called her 'Blossom,' because she is so fair and sweet, like a small pink flower."

"That is my second memory," she said; "a little flower-like babe, called 'Blossom,' her mother's idol, as Gordon is yours."

"Yes; her mother's idol," replied Sir Lionel.

"And you have left the little dainty flower you call Blossom for me, Sir Lionel!"

Again he whispered that he had left the whole world for her.

"I always thought," she said, musingly, "that the love of little children kept one's heart fresh and pure."

"I think it does," replied Sir Lionel.

"It has not done yours," she said suddenly. "You—ah, Heaven forgive the hardness of the words—you have sullied yours by love of me, If I had known," she continued, with desperate intentness, "that you had little children to love you, I should never have tried to win your love. It seems to me the love of little children is shelter sure and safe as shield of angels' wings.

An interruption came in the shape of a whirl of wind—a sudden gust of sea-breeze, which caught the creeping waves and dashed them on the shore. Sir Lionel drew back, but Lady Lynn did not stir.

"Take care my darling!" he cried—"take care! You will be drowned!"

"Drowned," she replied, in a voice of bitter pain—"drowned! Oh, Lionel, I would rather walk into the sea, a hundred times over, than say what I have to say to you!"

CHAPTER XL.

"I CANNOT speak quickly," said Lady Lynn—"I am afraid to hear even my own words. Lionel, I did not know, I never dreamed that you had a wife, that you had little children. I think that if I had known it, I should never have loved you, but I cannot tell; that was Fate—Fate led me to you, Fate pointed you out to me, and said, 'That is the one man in the world for you!' and my heart went out to you, never to be my own again—only to break. Fate did it. But, Lionel, oh listen love, my

only love—oh, Heaven! if I could forget that you have another love! Am I going mad?"

There was a daze of pain in the beautiful colorless face which frightened him.

"May I," she said, in a low voice, "may I rest in your arms one minute? May I lay my head on your breast one moment, while I find strength there for what I have to say? I—I shall not forget, dear, that another head has lain there, and that there is no more place for me."

He took her in his arms and held the beautiful face clasped to his breast in silence. Until the day he dies he will never forget the despair of it when once more she raised it to his.

"Now I am stronger, Lionel, I must tell you—love, we must part! While I thought you free, unmarried, unclaimed, without ties, I did not so plainly see my sin; I thought I was flying from misery to certain happiness—I hardly thought it a sin, but now I see differently. I could not take you from your wife and children, so we must part."

He looked at her in wonder too great for words.

"Part!" he gasped. "You cannot mean it, Vivian. Part!"

"Yes," she replied, "I have left my husband—I could do that for your sake, I can do no more—I cannot take you from your wife and children. I could sooner die! I am not wicked enough for that. I remember how those little children I told you about loved their father. I thought it the prettiest picture on earth to see them gathered in his arms, sitting on his knee, the little fair heads clustering round him, the big bright eyes growing larger with wonder as he told them story after story. Love for their mother was one thing, love for this kindly young father was quite another—he was a great hero in their eyes. I remember how I used to watch them, and think! Ah, well, Heaven knows—Heaven knows!

"I could not take you from your little children, love—perhaps from your wife—for I might hate the fair beauty of her face; I might hate her, because she is yours and you love her; but not from your children. I could not do that, so we must part."

The wind wailed over the water and her voice seemed to die with it. Again he started and cried,—

"Part! You cannot possibly mean that, Vivian!"

"Yes," she repeated, slowly, "let come what may, we must part." And then they stood for some minutes in silence.

"We have given up the whole world for each other," said Sir Lionel.

"You must not give up your children for me," she replied.

She looked over the wild waste of waters; the tide was creeping in, and the waves rose slowly to where they stood.

"I cannot forget," she said, "when my father lay dying, and my mother lay dead, Heaven sent to me a friend, sent a good, kind man who took care of me for the memory of that love. I could not commit so great a crime as to keep you from your children; you must go back to them and love them; I—I must die."

"You cannot mean it, Vivian," he said with a great gasping sigh, "after—after all this you cannot mean that we must part.'

"I mean it," she answered, with white lips and clenched hands. "I mean it, even should I die I am guilty enough before Heaven, but I will not make my guilt any darker, I will not take from innocent children the father who loves them."

"But, Vivian, we shall have ruined ourselves and the happiness of others in vain."

"It must be in vain," she replied, "it must be as I say; if I went with you now Lionel, I should never know one day's happiness, nay, not one hour's. I should always be thinking of the children you had left. I cannot tell you, I cannot describe what I think and feel, but it makes the whole world of difference to me. The one love that Heaven has planted more deeply than another in the heart of women is the love of children. I could bear to see women unhappy, but not to know that little children grieved. Go back to yours Lionel."

"I can never go back to them now," he said, moodily.

"Why, it is not too late," she said, eagerly.

"It is too late," he answered; "I have written and told my wife that I am leaving England forever, and that I am leaving with you, he replied.

"You have told her my name?"

"Yes," he replied, and the words of his letter returned to him: "The beautiful, guilty partner of my flight is Vivian, Countess of Lynn!" and here was Vivian, Countess of Lynn, refusing to go with him at all.

"It makes no difference," she said, despairingly. "I cannot help it! We must part, Lionel—you must go back to your wife and children, I go to my death!"

"I shall never return to them," he said, "the bare idea of

such a thing is absurd—the whole matter is absurd; it might have been a tragedy, What do you make of it? You cannot play with a man after this fashion! How can I go back to them now?"

"For my sake—only for my sake!" she cried, with such despair in her eyes, in her face and voice, that he would have given the whole world to have unsaid the words. "I thought," she cried, "you loved me so well. Oh, Lionel—Lionel!"

"I have written my letter to the earl," he said. "I shall post it from Paris. Come, Vivian, be reasonable; you cannot draw back now—we must meet our fate together!" But he might as well have spoken to the waves rolling in at his feet, and bidden them to stay."

They must part. She could leave the earl, she would have taken him from his wife, but not from his children—that was a depth of wickedness into which she could not fall. Say what he would, argue what he would, she never swerved from that point. He grew angry and reproached her; he grew frantic, and swore she should never leave him, come what might; he would rather slay her on the sands where she stood than live through the shame and the ridicule that must follow.

"I have known the caprice of women for many years," he said, "but this is something worse than caprice; there is no sense in it, no reason. If you refused to go any further with me, because you—you repented and thought it wrong, I could understand; but after going so far to turn round in this strange fashion, and refuse to go any further, it is a kind of thing I cannot understand."

But he might as well have spoken to wind or waves. She stood still, calm, motionless as a marble statue, despair in her face, and pain that was hard for him to see in her eyes.

"What is to become of you, Vivian?" he asked more gently.

"I do not know; I do not care. All that was best in me lies dead—died when I heard you were married. I care not what happens during the few weeks left for me to live. I would stand here and let the water carry me away, only I am afraid of the other life which they say no man can enter by the gates of sin. It matters little what becomes of me."

"But," he said, "I am afraid the earl will never——"

"Never take me back again," she interrupted. "I do not expect—I do not wish it. I would not go back. It is only gilded misery at the best. My life is all over. Vivian, Coun-

tess of Lynn, died here on the sands of Calais, when she heard that her lover was a married man."

"Vivian," he said, in a low voice, "what am I to do? Think of that."

"You will forget it," she said. "You are not like me. You were the world to me. I had nothing else to think of, care for, or love. You have loved before. You have other ties a thousand times more sweet and lasting than any you could form with me. It is an episode with you, it is life and death with me."

"It seems to me," said Sir Lionel, half sullenly, "that whatever else comes of this I shall look like the greatest simpleton that ever trusted to a woman's word.

"You should have told me the truth," she said, wringing her hands. "It is all too late now. All our lives are spoiled. We might have been happy; but nothing lies before us now save despair and death."

"Come with me," cried Sir Lionel. "This is but a caprice —there is no sense in it, no reason. We shall have to suffer the same penalties, let us suffer them together."

"Impossible," she said. "Whether in the years to come I shall curse or bless you I do not know. It seems to me I shall always love you as I do now—first, best, and dearest; but I shall see you never more. This is our farewell. Your little children rise between us—between me and your caresses. This is our farewell. Do you know what I read once Lionel?"

"No, my darling," he said, sadly, for the tone of her voice was like the sigh of the wind over dying roses.

"I read that man and woman combined made an angel, if so, when we meet—if we meet in Heaven—perhaps we shall be one. There is no hope in this world, and Lionel, it seems to me, beloved, that even in Heaven your wife and your children will claim you. Neither in this world nor in the next!"

"Lionel," she said, suddenly, "when one beloved dies, the one who loves her kisses her in death; so, my love, kiss me. I am dead! Kiss the face that will know smiles and roses no more, the eyes that will never more sun themselves in the light of love, the lips whose only music will be sighs. Once more, oh, love, and then good-by!"

The cold, thick despair had passed away; burning tears rained down the beautiful face—never so beautiful to him as then. The proud, sweet lips quivered as do the lips of a grieving child. He took her in his arms; perhaps in that one moment he loved her better than he had ever done.

"As you would kiss the face of the dead," she whispered.

And he kissed her in something like despair.

"Come with me darling," he whispered, while she lay with her face hidden on his breast. "Come with me, darling; I cannot live without you now."

But she only clung to him with more pitiful sobs and tears.

"Good-by, my love," she whiswered. "Childish hands push me from you. Good-by, dear love, good-by!"

And before he could answer her, before he had recovered himself, she had gone: she unclasped his arms, and walked away over the firm, yellow sands, so quickly, so swiftly, so suddenly that she was out of sight before he had decided what to do.

A thick mist was rising from the sea and the sands; a mist that seemed to envelope her, and in which, to his excited fancy, she seemed to float away out of sight. A minute since and she was standing there with weeping eyes, now she had gone from him forever; a minute since and her voice, with its sweet pathos, had filled his ear, now there was no sound save the murmur of the waters and the wailing of the wind.

What was he to do? Where had she gone? Was ever man in so terrible a fix? The sense of loss and ridicule that was on him almost drove him mad. Should he follow her through the mist and try to find her? If he did, should he be able to persuade her to change her mind? He doubted it.

The only thing seemed to be that he should move over to Paris, to the hotel where he had sent all his luggage and engaged rooms; from there he would send his letter to the earl, and if the earl chose to follow him and shoot him, let him do so. He made up his mind to one thing; if it came to a duel between them, he would fire in the air, and the earl should shoot him dead.

He went to Paris, and from Meurice's hotel he posted his letter. As Lord Lynn had said, he was no coward. He waited several days for the reply, which never came; and if ever a man smarted for a folly, or suffered for a sin, it was Sir Lionel Rydal. How he cursed his own folly, how he hated and loathed himself, could never be told in words.

When he knew that waiting was in vain; that Lord Lynn would neither write nor come, that there was no intention of pursuing him, that the only measure meted out to him was one of coolest contempt, he went away.

He cared little where he went or what he did; his own thoughts lashed him to madness. He had deserted the wife

whom he really esteemed and loved; he had deserted the children whom he worshipped, and all for—what? To gratify the idle, foolish passion of an hour; and even in that he had failed, the woman for whose sake he had committed these idle, wicked follies had in her turn abandoned him. Love him even as she did, she was not base enough to separate a man from his wife, or a father from his children.

"If ever a man marred his own life and blighted others," he said, "I am that man."

He had all the papers; he did not miss one line. He knew how each report would stab that loving heart, but he was powerless; he had committed the folly, and now he had to pay the price.

He wondered what they would have done and said, these people who wrote of him, if they knew the truth—if they knew that he was alone; and he would have risked his own fortune, he would have been willing to suffer for evermore, if by any means he could have known what had become of Vivian.

From the moment when, in the mist that came flashing from the sea, she had disappeared, he had heard no tidings of her. Whether she were living or dead, whether she had stood while the wild waters swept her away no one knew, he had never heard.

Hating himself, loathing his fate, cursing the folly that had brought him to such extremities, Sir Lionel left Paris. It mattered so little to him where he went, that hearing a casual acquaintance speak about Alexandria, he determined to go there, and Elinore, Lady Rydal, had heard the truth when they told her he was alone.

CHAPTER XLI.

A BEAUTIFUL woman, with the sunlight falling on her golden hair, stands watching the swell of the sweet southern sea that washes the south of sunny France; watches the waves gather and roll and break; watches the white sea-foam as it spreads over the golden sands and the pink sea-shells; watches the blue sky, and listens to the music of the wind as it freshens the waves and ripples the surface of the sea.

A beautiful woman, tall and of most gracious presence, one

of Nature's queens, sweet and stately, with a figure that is perfect in grace and symmetry; a voice perfect in its low, sweet music, but a face—one must be poet and artist both to describe that face.

We saw it first, reader, three years ago in the drawing-room at Dunwold; then we saw a light, girlish figure, all grace, and slender as a young palm-tree; now that same figure has reached the height of magnificent womanhood. She might by right of that great beauty, have been a crowned queen. We saw her three years ago, just before the sword fell; and then it had the bright loveliness of girlhood; the blue eyes were bright with love, the red lips rippled over with song; the light of love gladdened the fair young life.

Three years ago she stood by the window of the drawing-room at Dunwold, watching the sunlight on the limes and the distant blue line of water that marked the English Channel She sang the words,—

> Oh, murm'ring trees, oh, fragrant breeze;
> Oh, waving, whispering limes!
> Oh, there to be again with thee,
> My love of olden times!"

She was a queen of sorrow, and she wore her sorrow like a royal garment, with a grace and dignity that was imperial.

The villa in which she lives her secluded life is perhaps the loveliest spot in the south of France; behind it the tall Pyrenees raise their snow-clad heights; they shelter the beautiful valley from all cold winds; there, shielded from frost and snow, open to the warmth of the golden sun, there all sweet fruits ripen, grapes hang in rich, purple clusters, peaches and apricots shine on the walls, orange trees bend under the weight of golden fruit, the "lemon boughs" perfume the air, and the green myrtles shelter the nightingales.

The villa is a beautiful house, built by a rich Englishman some years ago, built in English fashion, and with all English comforts. It is built of white stone, with terraces of white marble, and fountains flinging their spray into the sunlit air, and from the highest terrace, where the vine-leaves make a deep green shade, one can watch the sleepy, blue tide come rolling in.

Elinore, Lady Rydal, loves this one spot, and as she stands there to-night, watching the tender light on the vine-leaves, watching the blue sky, the golden sun, and the blue waters, the old sorrow wakes up in her heart and cries—cries as it has

done for the last three years, with dull, despairing grief—grief that Time, the great healer, has failed to soothe. She thinks of the old home at Leeth, where the tall trees grow even down to the water's edge; she thinks of the grand old home at Dunwold, and her face, with a white maze of pain and wonder is raised to the blue skies. The question is still unanswered in her heart—"Why had he left her?" She had mourned for him as no widow ever mourns for a dead husband. The widow mourns with the hope that in Heaven she may see the beloved again. This hapless lady could only think of Heaven as the avenger of her wrongs, not as the comforter of her grief.

That which Lady Rydal's friends had foreseen had come to pass; she could not live at Dunwold; life there was living death; it was continual torture, because of the associations with him. When the first deadening force of the blow died away, and she awoke to a full living reality of what she had to suffer, she cried aloud that she could not bear it, that she must go—anywhere—to the uttermost ends of the earth, rather than live where everything reminded her so forcibly of him.

When the little Gordon fell ill—with all his bright beauty and sturdy gallantry, he was not a strong child—it might be that the Squire spoke to the doctors, it might be that they agreed among themselves that it would be best for Lady Rydal to leave Dunwold; he was certain that each one recommended the same thing, that she should take the children to the South of France. She had demurred at first, but after a time she saw that it was impossible to live at Dunwold. She remembered those words in her husband's letter.

"I shall not come into your life again. Gordon—Heaven bless the child whom I shall no more see!—Gordon will succeed me. You will live at Dunwold until he is of age."

She wondered how, as she thought of the words, how he could ever have written them. Dunwold was beautiful enough, but to her it was only a grave—a great dark grave, wherein her love was buried.

She made no objection to anything that was done in those days. She came down to the magnificent state drawing-room one morning, and found that the superb portrait of her husband, painted by Millais, had been taken away. The handsome debonair face, the blue laughing eyes, the beautiful mouth with its somewhat sensuous lines, the brave, gallant young face marred only by an expression of latent weakness, was gone. She made no comment. She never asked who had removed it from where it had been placed, until the morning

she was leaving home, then looking with piteous eyes at Squire Gordon, she said.

"Papa, will you give orders that Lionel's picture shall be put back in the drawing-room? It is his own home, and his portrait has a right to some place in it."

The squire, who was famous for his patience, muttered something of an appalling nature between his teeth, for which he was severely reproved by his energetic wife, who acted always on the broad principle that no matter what a husband did he was sure to be wrong. But he attended to his daughter's wish, and the portrait was restored to its usual place.

Lady Rydal found it a great relief when at last all arrangements were made. As time passed on, she found her trouble harder to bear. She shrank from the sight of every human face, except the kindly ones of the squire and his wife. She could not see friends or visitors. In her own eyes she stood apart from all other women; the disgrace of her husband's sin seemed to have fallen over her. She could not endure any mention of his name. She prayed one prayer to the squire and his wife—it was,—

"Do not let any one come near to pity me or to blame him."

The squire promised that it should never happen. She looked earnestly at him as she said,—

"I believe if a visitor mentioned his name to me, papa, and said one word against him, I should fall down dead."

Of course the squire said that was all nonsense—and equally of course his wife agreed that it was only too probable.

Neither the squire nor Mrs. Gordon will ever forget the months they spent at Dunwold. The squire knew how greatly he was needed at home at Leeth, but he could not leave his daughter in her distress and anguish. At last, when Gordon fell ill, the crisis came, and it was then that Lady Rydal prayed to leave the home that was her husband's. It happened that on the very day when the doctors had given their decision that both mother and children would be better in the south of France, that the squire, reading the "Times," saw an advertisement of the villa, to be sold or let.

He secured it at once; it was the very thing. The doctors in speaking of Lady Rydal had said—

"Let her go where she will be surrounded by the beauties of nature, and where she can occupy herself in the education of her children, and she will recover."

So it was settled. Dunwold was to be left in charge of the housekeeper; by Lady Rydal's express orders, it was to be kept just as though the family were at home. Sir Lionel's rooms were always to be in readiness for him. It was his own home, and although he had left it he said forever, he might return at any day or any hour.

"I shall be glad, papa," she said, "when I have left the place, and nothing reminds me of past happiness and present pain."

Two of the household absolutely insisted on going with Lady Rydal; one was Harry Bennet, the old butler—he had put the matter in what he had thought a very strong light to the squire. At first Lady Rydal had said she would take no English servants with her, that she would surround herself with strange faces. but Bennet had spoken seriously to the squire.

"I know why my lady is going, squire," he said; "she wants to forget if she can, but she will never forget here. I must go with her. I make bold enough to say this, squire, and my lady knows it is true, she could not get on without me. No one knows what may happen in a far off land like that. *It is just possible that Sir Lionel may come back to her there!* My lady must have a protector, and there is no one who would lay down his life so freely in her service as I should."

So it was settled that Bennet and Mrs. Rogers should go with Lady Rydal.

"I shall come and see you soon, my darling," said the squire. "You will try to be happy—promise me."

She clung to him with loving, grateful thanks and tears, he had been so good to her—so good and kind, and the last words she said to him were these,—

"I will try and be happy, papa!" and the words echoed in his ears long after she had gone.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE salt sea was not more bitter or briny than the tears that fell from Lady Rydal's eyes as she crossed the blue channel that she had watched so often from her own home.

It was well for her that the little Gordon was really ill and required her attention. They had imagined that travelling

would divert her mind, whereas it had only made her think more than ever of the husband she had lost, and lost through frailty—not death. It brought back so forcibly to her mind the journeys she had taken with him; his tender care of her; his loving eagerness to shield her from every shade of trouble; his devotion to her; his thought for her comfort; and now he had left her. She was flying from the home that had once been Heaven to her, because she could not bear the pain of living there without him, and he had gone—left her.

She was sitting on deck, thinking these bitter thoughts, when Gordon sprang from his nurse and ran up to her.

"Mamma, mamma! pretty mamma!" he cried, "you are crying again, you have tears on your face, and see, tears on the velvet. Why do you cry always, mamma, darling? Other mammas do not cry!"

And the child with his father's eyes clasped his little arms round her neck.

"I love you, mamma, I love you!" he cried; "Let me kiss the tears away, you must not cry. What makes you cry?"

Ah, Heaven answer for her. What makes her cry? She looks into the innocent face of her little child, and wonders whether question so sad or so pitiful were ever asked before.

What makes her cry? Kiss the sweet, sad face, little Gordon. You may know in the time to come what has caused your mother's tears!

No lady ever had two more devoted servants than Lady Rydal. The old butler Bennet seemed to renew his youth in taking care of her; his devotion knew no bounds, he studied her least wish, he remembered her least desire; he would go for miles to get her some little dainty which he thought would please her, he never relaxed in his care of her. If she went out to the woods or to the steep mountains, or by the golden sands, he knew no peace of mind or rest until she returned. No mother ever watched over a pet child as the old butler did over Lady Rydal.

Mrs. Rogers the nurse, was equally devoted to her; she seemed to live entirely to please her and to wait upon her; she was devoted to her and the two beautiful children. No other English servants were in the household; these two Lady Royal trusted as she did herself, but she would have no others near. Stout, strong French maids supplied the deficency; and though at first it was somewhat awkward, and the mistakes were frequent and many, yet there was great comfort in it; there could be no gossiping, no repeating of stories. The two Eng-

lish servants knew their lady's history, the foreign ones only knew that she was a great English lady whose husband had gone away, they neither, knew nor cared, nor wondered why.

The children had grown; the little Gordon—a bright, handsome boy nearly four years old when his mother's pitiful story first began—was now nearly seven; he had outgrown his strength, and looked delicate; his face had grown more beautiful, it was all intelligence and spirituality; the eyes, so like his father's, were clear and bright.

The child had a most wonderful mind; his perceptions were most acute—the words "quick and clever" hardly applied to him—he was so much more than that; he seemed to know by instinct, by a sudden, swift unerring judgment, what others only learned after long thought; a child to be loved and worshipped, yet almost to be feared; he was quite sure to say what he thought, and his thoughts were sure to be both honest and original. He had no idea of human respect, or of repressing thoughts or words lest they should hurt another.

The one wonder and puzzle of the child's life was his beautiful mother; why she was so sad? why her eyes were always shadowed with pain, and her face wet with tears?

The second great mystery was his father; where was he? the handsome loving young father, whose visits to the nursery had been the grand event of his little life. No one realized how the child loved his father, and no memory of him had perished in the little faithful heart. He remembered his father's handsome face, the sunny, blue eyes, the laughing mouth, the kindly, cheery voice; he remembered even the strong, warm clasp of his father's hand; they had enjoyed such romps, such fun, the old walls of Dunwold had re-echoed with the child's laughter; to see his father and spend a few minutes with him, the child would do or suffer anything in the world; and suddenly over his little life falls a terrible blank—his father is gone.

He was not quite four years old, but he was old enough to have a quick and vivid memory, and he never forgot him. He could not understand, but he was shrewd enough to see, that some cloud had fallen over the house; his father had gone; his beautiful young mother was always weeping; in his father's place was the old squire; and Mrs. Gordon, whom the boy frankly and freely detested, seemed to have the command of everything. Where was he, this beautiful kindly father, who had filled the whole household with laughter and glee? Once, and he never, child though he was, forgot the day he was sitting with Lady Rydal on the terrace at Dunwold. Nurse

Rogers was teaching little Blossom to play at ball near them, and Gordon, thinking with longing light of the games he had played when his father had flung the ball to such a height they had thought it would never come down again, full of impatient longing for the same dear father and the same merry games, he cried out,—

"Mamma; where is papa?"

May Heaven help the wife and mother, through whose heart that question pierces like a sharp sword. Lady Rydal shrank from the words as from a blow.

"Where is he?" persisted the child; "I can never find him, and I want him; no one plays with me like papa; where is he?"

She raised her sorrowful face, and called him to her, only Heaven knew how her heart bleed in that moment.

"Do you love papa so much, my darling;" she asked, and the child with his father's eyes, answered,—

"Yes."

"Papa has gone on a long journey," she replied, "and he will be away from us for a long time."

"Why did he not take us?" asked the boy; and again the words came to her mind,—"the beautiful guilty partner of my flight is Vivian, Countess of Lynn."

She bent down and kissed the sweet bright face.

"Papa could not take us, dear; he has left us to love each other."

"But when will he come back?" was the impatient question.

"I cannot tell," replied the hopeless mother whose husband had deserted her.

"I want papa," said the boy, with a sob. "I love papa—I want him!" and she could do nothing but take him in her arms and moan over him until Mrs. Rogers, attracted by the sound, came up to them, and then Lady Rydal fell back white, faint, and trembling on her chair.

"What is it, Master Gordon?" the nurse cried. "Have you been teasing mamma?"

"No," said the child, shortly. "I never tease her. I only asked where papa is. I want papa!" and the brave little voice died off in a sob; then nurse knew what was the matter.

"Go and play with little Blossom, dear," she said to the boy. "I will take care of mamma."

It was no unusual thing for the nurse to find Lady Rydal in this state. She soothed and calmed her, then she went after

the child, only four years old then, and with such a shadow on his life.

"Master Gordon," she said, "I want to talk to you. Come and listen. I want you to promise me that you will not talk to mamma about papa again?"

"Why not?" he asked, quickly.

"I will tell you why; you are quite old enough to understand. Your mamma loves papa very much indeed, and papa has gone on a long journey—for a long time, and when mamma thinks of him and hears you speak of him, it makes her very unhappy and makes her cry—do you see?"

"Yes," replied the child, gravely, and the first of many shadows fell over the brave little face.

"Remember," said the kindly nurse; "you must not speak to mamma about papa, because it makes her cry."

"I will not," said the boy; and he kept his word. He never mentioned his father, but the question his lips must not utter was asked always by his eyes; he would sit with those large bright eyes fixed on his mother's face, and the question she read in them was always,—

"Where is papa?"

"The Little Blossom," as every one called Victoria, had no recollection of Sir Lionel. When they both grew older and could interchange thoughts and ideas, Gordon made little Blossom his *confidante*.

"We have got a papa," he would say to her—"a tall, beautiful papa, like the pictures of the knights in your story-book, Blossom; and he has gone away over a long journey, so far away and nurse says that we must never talk to mamma about him, because it makes her cry."

"It makes me cry," said the fair little Blossom, with unconscious hypocrisy—"it makes me cry, too."

"No, it does not, Blossom; it cannot. You do not remember him; you cannot cry for anything or any one you have never seen."

"I want my papa!" cried Blossom, proud of having something to want, and with a small sense of grievance that she herself did not understand.

"You must never cry about him, or talk about him," said Gordon, eagerly; "but, Blossom, when we are together we will talk about him, and I will tell you how he used to play with me."

So it often happened that the two children would leave nurse and wander off together, while Gordon told his little

sister all about papa. Papa, in Gordon's eyes, was a hero—a prince; there was no one in the wide world to compare to him; the little fellow was quite old enough to understand that the change from one country to another, the absence of all the old faces, had something to do with papa.

Lady Rydal had been at the villa two years now, and this morning, as she stands on the terrace, she is wondering if all her life will be spent in this wild, beautiful, lonely place; and seeing that her lady stands there so long, and looks so sad Mrs. Rogers did what she invariably did when my lady looked ill or grieved, she sent the children to console her. The sweet sound of silvery laughter floats over the vine leaves, nearer and nearer come the happy voices; the children are having a race.

They reach Lady Rydal, both beautiful little faces flushed with running, and Blossom being first, was the first to speak.

"Mamma!" she cries, "nurse says you will be tired, you have been here so long," but Gordon looked at his mother's face, and saw there the trace of tears, and his eyes asked of her the old question, one she could never answer,—

"Where is papa?"

CHAPTER XLIII.

A GREAT event was to happen; it was the springtime of one of the loveliest years that the world has ever seen. It was as though smiles from Heaven itself brightened, warmed, and gladdened the whole fair world.

The squire had written to his beloved daughter to say that he would pay his long-promised visit at last. The earth was resting under the warm rays of the sun, the seed was all in the ground, and he thought that he could spare a few weeks now. Mrs. Gordon was of course to accompany him, and he hoped to find his beloved child better and in good spirits. He went on to say in his letter that he was glad to come, for Gordon was seven years old now, and he must have an English education.

The same morning on which she received the letter, Lady Rydal called her little son to her side.

"Gordon," she said," you remember grandmamma? She is

coming to see us. I hope you will be very nice and kind to her."

"I do not like her," said Gordon, with a flash of his beautiful blue eyes.

"Why not my darling?" asked Lady Rydal, half ashamed of herself for asking the question.

"She is cross," he replied, steadily. "She scolds grandpapa; I have heard her. I do not like her."

"You were a little boy when you saw her last," said Lady Rydal, "only four years old, and now you are nearly seven. You must forget that you did not like her then and be very kind to her now. The mark of a gentleman is courtesy and kindness to ladies."

"Am I a gentleman, mamma?" he asked, with a bright flush on his face.

"I hope so, my dear. It is not money or even good birth that makes a gentleman. A gentleman means a man whose manners are gentle and courteous, because his heart is good."

"I will be a gentleman, mamma," said the boy, and then, from the look in his eyes, she knew the question floating through his mind was this,—

"Is papa a gentleman?"

She felt her face grow scarlet as the boy's eyes lingered on her. If fidelity and truth were characteristics of a gentleman, what was Sir Lionel? and she noticed from that time forward Gordon was always gentle and deferential to all women. The May morning came when the squire and Mrs. Gordon reached the pretty villa at the foot of the Pyrenees—the squire, much excited with his journey, proud of being so near Italy, wishing he could speak French; Mrs. Gordon, sustained by the conciousness of the immense superiority of everything English, filled with a gentle sense of condescension for all unfortunate foreigners.

Both the squire and his wife were startled by the sight of Lady Rydal; the two years spent in the healthy sea and mountain breezes had made her beauty something wonderful to see; the light had deepened in her blue eyes even as the sheen of her golden hair was of darker hue. The fairest color was on her face and though the sweet, sad story written there was so plainly read, she looked more beautiful than she had done in the fairest days of her youth. She was eighteen when she was married—twenty-three at the time our story opened; she was in her twenty-sixth year now, but many a girl of eighteen looked older and lacked her exquisite and dainty bloom,

"Why, my dear," cried Mrs. Gordon, when the first rapture of the meeting was over, "why, Elinore, you have grown more beautiful than ever. What a pity and shame that such a beautiful woman should be shutup here in this solitude! If you were only in the world, my dear, you would have it at your feet."

"Mamma does not like the world," interrupted little Gordon "When we say our prayers she makes us say: "Pray Heaven keep me unspotted from the world," and she means the same world that you are talking about."

"Heaven bless the child!" cried the startled lady, "one would think you were a little missionary; what a style for any child to indulge in."

And Gordon had a retort ready, but a look from his mother's eyes silenced him.

The squire and his wife agreed that there had never been so sad a face. This beautiful woman, so fair, so graceful, so fitted to adorn the world, and forced by the sin of another to fly from it. They were thankful to find that she was in good health and in better spirits, she was as happy now as it was probable she would ever be.

The pity and the shame of it! There were times now when the squire raged and raved until his wife hardly knew what to do with him.

To see this beautiful and beloved child of whom he had been so proud and fond, deserted—abandoned in the very prime of her life; he looked at her and at her children until he bit his lips with rage, but he said no word to her. He was very proud of the two beautiful children and the facility with which they spoke French. Mrs. Gordon made an especial favorite of Blossom; she could see no fault in the child; she spoiled and indulged her on every occasion, while she was very strict with Gordon. She seemed in some measure to avenge the faults of the father on the son. She frequently lectured Mrs. Rogers on duty.

"You must keep strict watch and guard over Master Gordon, nurse," she would say. "He may be like his father in more ways than in having the same colored eyes."

Mrs. Rogers always resented these little lectures. She was like Lady Rydal—knowing he had done wrong, it was more bitter than death to hear that wrong-doing alluded to in any way or shape. The first few days of the visit passed pleasantly enough—the squire was so well pleased to see his darling better,

the children brightened the atmosphere, and the weather was so beautiful that it was a treat to be out of doors.

There came an evening when Mrs. Gordon was tired, and did not go out; the squire and his daughter were alone. They were standing in one of the wildest and most picturesque spots in Europe, on a small wooden bridge that spanned a great waterfall; the rustic bridge reached from rock to rock, the waters foamed beneath; on one side lay the great blue sea, calm as a summer's lake—on the other rose the great Pyrenees, crowned with eternal snows.

The waters foamed as they dashed from rock to rock; the white spray leaped to the bridge whereon they stood watching the seething, boiling waters.

"A man would have but small chance there," said the squire: and Lady Rydal thought to herself there were darker gulfs, deeper depths than these.

"Elinore," said the squire, "I am glad to have you this one evening to myself—I want to talk to you. Three years have passed now since—well. I will restrain myself—since that blow fell which has so completely changed your life."

The beautiful face grew pale, as she bent over the surging waters.

"Must you speak about it, papa?" she said, in a low voice, "Spare me if you can."

"I must speak of it, my dear; I would not, if it could be avoided. My darling Elinore, you cannot go on living in this fashion always."

She raised her face to his, and he was startled by the intensity of her expression.

"Papa," she said, "you see the torrent of water there, so dark, even with its white foam; I would rather throw myself into the very depths of it than go back to life in England again."

'Then you have given up life and all it holds, Elinore?" said the squire, sadly.

"I gave it up long ago, papa," she replied.

The squire went on:

"It is three years, Elinore, since Lionel went away. I want to tell you that nothing has been heard of him."

"He is too happy with her," thought the unhappy lady: "he has no time to remember those left behind."

"His bankers," continued the squire, "have heard from him once—and once only, then he was at Alexandria, and he sent for money; that was the same year in which he left Eng-

land; they have heard nothing since. The lawyers have heard nothing at all."

She made no answer; only Heaven knew how great was the temptation to fling herself over into the dark foaming waters.

"It seems strange," continued the squire; and "besides that I have made inquiries about that—that unfortunate woman, the Countess of Lynn, and can hear nothing of her. Lord Lynn made her a handsome allowance, but she has never claimed it. The earl has heard nothing about her. They seem to have disappeared from human eyes."

"Do not speak of her, papa," wailed Lady Rydal. "I cannot bear to hear it. Do not even mention her name."

"I will not do so, my darling, since you dislike it so greatly; but I must tell you this—from different rumors, different little things, I have heard, I cannot help thinking that wherever Lionel is, he is alone."

"Why do you think so, papa?" she asked, quickly.

"No one has seen him with any lady; many people have met him, many have talked to him, have stopped at the same hotel with him, but no one has seen or heard of Vivian, Countess of Lynn. It is strange, is it not?"

"Yes," she said, wearily. "Do not speak of her, papa— I cannot bear it."

"Then you will not come back to England with me?"

"No. I shall never see England again," she replied, "I could not bear it. My sorrow does not grow less, papa, it grows greater. I have often thought what I should do with the wretched remnant of my wretched life. I have decided at last —I shall never see England and Dunwold again. I shall send Gordon to England when he is a little older and stronger; when he comes of age he will take possession of Dunwold—if not in his own right, he will hold it in trust for his father; and Blossom I shall keep for many years yet with me."

But the squire shook his head, gravely.

"I have rarely seen a fault in you, Elinore," he said, "but this is one. Your sorrow is natural enough, but you have no right to cloud the lives of your children with it, and it will indeed darken them for all time if you keep this resolve. Think of my words. We had better go back, your mantle is wet with the white foam."

As they went home to the villa they were both quite unconscious of what awaited them.

CHAPTER LXIV.

LITTLE Gordon met them in the vine-covered porch, his face was full of eager, earnest light.

"Hush, mamma—hush grandpapa," he said; "nurse has placed me here to tell you that grandmamma is very ill, and to beg that you will make no noise."

"Send nurse to me, darling," said Lady Rydal, gently; "do not be alarmed papa, there is nothing the matter, I am sure."

But there was more the matter than Lady Rydal knew. Mrs. Rogers came to her looking scared and frightened.

"Is Mrs. Gordon ill, nurse?" she asked.

"I am afraid so, my lady; last night she had a severe headache, a curious headache, her eyes, she said, were like balls of fire, and this morning I took her some tea, she seemed worse, but she would not let me tell you and now——"

"What now, Rogers?" said Lady Rydal gently, seeing that the faithful servant paused.

"I hope you will not be alarmed or nervous, but now I am afraid, my lady, that she is very ill."

Lady Rydal looked grave and anxious.

"What is the matter with her, Rogers?" she asked.

"I am afraid you will be nervous, my lady; I may be mistaken too, but I think—I fear it is a case of fever—and of a dangerous kind. Do you remember, my lady, that last year there was a terrible fever raging about this time and of this kind? it did not reach us, but it was in all the cities round about."

"Surely it is not that," said Lady Rydal with white lips. "What will papa say?"

The squire was a brave man, but when he heard this terrible news he was startled..

"We must have a doctor at once," he said. "My poor wife!"

In that moment all her faults were forgiven and forgotten, and the squire was ready to swear that there never had lived a woman so sweet-tempered and good-humored as his wife.

It was fever and no mistake, one of those terrible, malignant fevers that come at a moment's notice, and strike down with

the unerring certainty of death. Lady Rydal saw it in one moment ; the poor lady was already delirious and calling out for water, cold, clear water, for she was on fire—on fire.

" What shall we do, Elinore ? " cried the squire, leaning, as strong and brave men always do, on the strength of a woman.

" We must have a doctor first. You must go yourself, papa ! We are five miles from St. Louis ; it is a large city ; you will find plenty of doctors—bring one back."

" Do you know one ? " asked the squire, eagerly.

" I have heard of Monsieur d'Antoine, who is said to be very clever," she replied ; " go for him."

And quickly as it was possible for it to be done, the squire was back again with the doctor. He went at once to the sick-room. Yes, it was fever, he said, and certainly malignant fever of a dangerous kind. It must have been coming on for some time, and she must have experienced nurses—really experienced, or he would not answer for her life.

Lady Rydal wrung her hands in dismay. Where were they to find such nurses, here in this strange country ?

" I can assist you in this," said the doctor. " There is one of the finest institutions in the world at St. Louis a house of nursing sisters, quite a novelty, but one that will spread."

" Nursing sisters ? " cried the Squire. " What in the world does that mean ? "

The doctor smiled, with just a little shrug of the shoulders ; he thought how strongly English the good, honest man before him was.

" I can soon explain what ' nursing sisters' mean," he replied. " They are simply a band of good and holy women, living together ; they are not bound, so far as I know. by any vows, and they are at the service of all the sick people who may wish for them."

" No vows," cried the squire ; " I like that ! "

" This sisterhood," continued the doctor, " differs from all others in this respect that the sisters go out to nurse. They go anywhere, when they are needed, from a palace to a hovel. They ask no reward. If any one likes to give alms to the convent they can do so, but on the other hand, if the sisters find that they are with very poor people, alms come from the convent to support them."

" Very good," cried the squire, " I should hardly have thought there was such a sensible institution in France. And you advise me to apply there ? "

"Most certainly. You will get a better nurse there than you would in any other part of the world. I am quite sure of that. The good sisters are not all French; there are some English and some Italians. Many of them speak English."

"I will go at once," said the squire, "that is—if Lady Rydal approves."

He remembered years afterwards how he had gone to his daughter's room, and found her standing where a great slanting sunbeam fell on the floor—standing with a thoughtful look on her beautiful face.

"Papa," she said, gravely, "what new trouble is coming to us?" and then the squire told her his errand.

"I thought I had better consult you, Elinore, before going. Some people might object to having 'sisters in the house."

"Papa," she said, gravely, "if I had no children, that is just what I should like to be. I should like to give my life to nursing the sick."

"You have other ties, my darling," said the squire, hastily; he could never bear any allusion to the one terrible fact that she was a deserted wife.

So the squire drove off again, and while he was gone Lady Rydal busied herself in making all needful arrangements. The patient was to be isolated, the doctor said, for the fever was terribly contagious.

She thought of her children, and the faintest dawn of danger for them was like death to her. They must go, and go at once. But who would take them—where could they go to?

If she had known it! It was too late; and even then, the same fever that had struck down the strong woman in the prime of her life and strength—had touched with its flame of fire the two beautiful little children. When Lady Rydal went into the nursery, she found Gordon fast asleep with heavy, labored breathing, and a crimson flush on his face.

There was no sound of shrill, sweet laughter from the nursery; a strange, ominous silence like a heavy cloud, hung over it. Blossom sat, silent and smileless for once, by her mother's side.

"I am so cold, mamma," she said, with a shudder—"so cold; and Gordon has gone to sleep."

She fell on her knees with a low cry; she knew at once what it was—one was ill with the fire, and the other with the chill of the terrible fever.

"Oh Heaven, spare my children!" she cried.

Where was he whose place in this hour of danger should have been by her side—where was he?

She raised the little ones in her arms. Gordon's head was heavy, and she found the child was not, as she had thought, asleep, but in a perfect stupor.

She undressed him and placed him in bed, then she put Blossom in her pretty white cot. She sent messengers in hot haste after the doctor; but when he came, it was only to confirm her fears—both children had the fever, but the boy was the most dangerously ill.

She stood while the doctor gave his decision as some women stand while sentence of death is pronounced over them—white, rigid, unflinching; no tears dimmed her eyes, no cry came to her lips; her hands were tightly clenched, her eyes fixed on him.

"Tell me the whole truth," she said, in a low voice; "they are all I have in the world. I can bear the truth; I cannot bear suspense. Will they live or die?"

"I cannot tell you, madam," said the doctor; "the issue lies in the hands of Heaven. They have both a most serious attack of fever; but the boy is at present the worst. We must do our best."

"Is there any great danger?" she asked; he would have given the world to have said "No." He felt far more compassion for the mother than for the children.

"There is always danger, madam," he replied, "in every fever. Good nursing is the best remedy, and your children will have that. Hope for the best. I will return in a few hours."

Lady Rydal went, with the same white, rigid face, to Mrs. Gordon's room.

"Nurse!" she cried, "I want you," and Mrs. Rogers hardly knew the voice; she hardly knew the face either, when her eyes fell on it.

"Nurse," said Lady Rydal, "both children have the fever; can you come to them?"

A cry of horror came from the kindly woman.

"Both; my lady?" she repeated, and Lady Rydal answered,—

"Yes."

So when the squire came back, bringing with him a kindly-faced English sister, she met him in the vine-covered porch.

"Papa," she said, and this time her voice had the strain of hopeless despair, "both children have the fever, will you fetch

another nurse? These foreign servants will be quite useless. Will you ask for an English nurse?"

"My dear Elinore," said the squire, and his honest face was full of anxious concern.

Lady Rydal turned to the sister, and held out her hand.

"How good of you to come," she said, "Pray forgive me if I seem stupid. I am stunned and bewildered with surprise and pain. My children—they are all I have in the world—and they have both taken the fever. I—you must forgive me if I cannot remember what I ought to say—or do."

And as they went together to the sick-room, the sister turned to the squire.

"The lady's husband is dead?" she asked, and the squire ground some bitter words between his teeth.

"He is worse than that," he replied, and the gentle pious woman did not dare to ask another question.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE most mysterious thing that could have happened, the squire said, why they should have taken the fever was a problem to him; why this peculiar and horrible fever should have fixed on wealthy English people would have puzzled a philosopher. If some of those dirty half-clad children whom he saw in St. Louis had caught it, there would have been little wonder, but for his wife, so strong and healthy, for the children so well cared for, it was certainly wonderful. The squire remembered the line:

"Sorrows come in battalions, never alone."

Mrs. Gordon had a terrible fight for her life. She was strong, but the fever made terrible havoc with her; she was well nursed; the squire had returned to the convent to fetch a second nurse, believing that the world must have come to an end, and even with nurses, with the devotion of Mrs. Rogers and the tender skill of Lady Rydal, it was a hard battle. No one who lived in the villa during those days of terrible anxiety and suspense ever forgot it; day and night seemed one, there was no relaxation, no release. Mrs. Gordon lay sick unto death in the rooms that faced the south, and the children in the bright lofty rooms that faced the west.

There the little band of devoted nurses fought the grim fever hour by hour, with skill and tenderness and unfailing

care; but for many long days they were in dire suspense ovet Mrs. Gordon. Thanks to her strong, healthy constitution, she improved, and when the crisis of the fever had passed, she gave some signs of recovery; but the children were dangerously ill, and it was over them that Lady Rydal expended all her strength and energy.

She never left them; if, yielding to the entreaties of sisters and nurses, she went away for half an hour, she would return before the time had expired, trembling with fear. She had fallen asleep and dreamed Gordon was worse, or she had fancied that Blossom was calling her.

"The lady's heart is knitted to those of her children," said one of the sisters to the squire. "If they die, she will die!"

"Do you think there is any likelihood of it?" asked the squire, brusquely; and the sister answered,—

"Yes; I think they are far more likely to die than to live."

Then the squire fell thinking. What should he do if these three died under his charge? Sir Lionel had behaved like a villain, but he ought if possible to know that wife and children were both in danger; yet, how to let him know, how to discover his whereabouts? If he were parading Europe with the beautiful, shameless woman, his partner in guilt, it was not worth while to take any trouble over him; in that case the probability was that he would not care to see any of them again.

Sorely puzzled and tried was the good old squire; he did not know what to do for the best. He began to wonder what would happen if Gordon, the little heir, should die—who was next of kin? If his beloved Elinore died, then Sir Lionel would be free to marry the beautiful woman for whom he had deserted his wife, he would marry her, and perhaps a son of hers would take little Gordon's place. How easy seemed the way of iniquity; this woman this fair Countess of Lynn, had destroyed his daughter's life, and now it might be even that she was going to take her place—to be mistress of Dunwold, wife of its master.

Then the old squire paused in his meditations.

"I will never believe it," he said to himself. "There is a just God in Heaven; I will never believe it."

His wife grew a shade better, and the children a shade worse. Then a great calamity happened. The English sister who had first come to their assistance—a kindly, clever, quiet woman—took the fever herself, and was taken back to the convent to be nursed

It was then, and for the first time, that the squire was glad to think of the hoarded thousands lying idle; his daughter had not till then touched her husband's money. Now the squire's only comfort was to go from the villa to the convent, amongst the half-distracted women, and tell them to spare no expense—money was but dross, and if lavish expenditure could help them, let the hoarded thousands go. To this day the good sisters raise their hands and eyes in wonder when they tell of the great generosity and the wonderful wealth of the English milord. When Sister Paula fell ill, the superioress of the convent sent in haste for the squire.

"I have no more sisters to spare," she said, gently; "the fever is bad at St. Louis, and we must find some nurses for the poor; we cannot neglect them."

"What shall we do?" asked the squire, hopelessly. "My wife is a shade better, but the children are worse; and Lady Rydal looks so ill herself, that I should never be surprised to hear that she has fallen dead,"

"I can do one thing, if you are willing," said the superioress; "I can send to Paris. We have a large house in Paris, what we call a *novitiate*, and there are several English sisters there. If you wish it, I will send for one; but it will be an expensive journey."

It was a positive relief to the squire to be able to talk about money.

"Never mind the expense," he said, "that is nothing. If I could purchase their health and safety by giving my whole fortune, I would gladly do so. By all means send for the sister."

Send for the sister! How little he thought that those words were the most important he had ever spoken in his life. "Send for the sister!"—words written by the hand of the Father.

While Mrs. Gordon lies struggling back to life, and the children sleep in the torpor of exhaustion—while Lady Rydal seems to herself to die during every hour of that terrible time, a message flashes across the wires, from the foot of the Pyrenees to Paris. Let us follow it.

It flashed by the mighty aid of electricity, more swiftly than thought can reach; before the squire has left the station at St. Louis, it had reached the gay and brilliant city.

A messenger took it to the "Convent de St. Maria," in the Rue d'Alsace, and then it was opened and read by the superioress—a long telegram:

"From the Superioress of the Convent of St. Louis to the

Mother-General of the Convent Rue d'Alsace, Paris.—Will you send best and most clever nursing sister you have; rich and noble English family in distress; and two children dangerously ill of fever; no expense to be spared; send at once."

The mother-general, who was herself the foundress of this vastly needed order, read the telegram with knitted brows. She fully understood the import of the words "rich and noble English family." Yet, looking round the sisterhood, she was at a loss whom to send. Two of the English sisters were away in London. They had been sent for to attend some great persons, and could not be recalled, and it would be quite useless to send French sisters who could not understand English.

Suddenly her face brightened, and she rose from her seat.

"If she will do it," she murmured to herself "She is the very person."

The superioress made her way quickly through the long corridors, and rapped at the door of a small room.

"Come in," said a clear, sweet voice—a voice which, despite its sweetness, seemed to be full of tears.

A tall beautiful woman rose to greet her—a woman beautiful as a dream, dressed in the long black robe of the sisterhood, a white veil hung in statuesque folds from her head to her feet; a face so beautiful and so sad had never been seen in this world before.

"Good morning, Sœur Marie," said the superioress, "I want to speak to you for a few minutes."

With the royal grace of a queen the beautiful woman bowed and placed a chair for the superioress, then stood before her awaiting her commands.

"I am sorely troubled, Sœur Marie," she said. "You know that just at present the fever is bad all over France; it is bad at St. Louis, and here at Paris also."

"I am sorry to know it," said the sweet, low voice, so full of tears.

"All our sisters are busy," continued the superioress; "Bernaline came home last night very ill, and I really do not know what to do; we have many more demands than nurses."

"I will do anything to help you," said Sœur Marie.

"I am sure of it, sister; but I hesitate before asking this favor of you. You asked, before you joined the sisterhood, a favor—it was that you, being English yourself, might never be asked to nurse any English people, rich or poor—did you not?"

"Yes, I made that request," replied the sister.

"And I," interrupted the superioress, "have most scrupulously adhered to it."

Sœur Marie bent down with infinite grace and kissed the superioress's hand.

"You have been all that is most kind and generous to me," she said.

The superioress went on.

"Now the time has come that I find myself in a great dilemma. Will you read this telegram, sister, that I have just received from St. Louis, and then you will understand?"

The hands held out for the telegram were not much like the hands of a poor working sister; they were white as the driven snow, beautifully shaped; they would have served as a model to a sculptor or artist; even now a thrill of admiration passes through the superioress's mind as she gazes on them.

"The hands of a queen," she thought to herself as she placed the telegram in them. Sœur Marie read it attentively.

"St. Louis lies at the foot of the Pyrenees, does it not?" she asked.

"Yes, between the mountains and the sea," said Sister Marie.

"The English are everywhere," said the superioress.

Sœur Marie read again:

"A rich and noble English family—a lady and two children dangerously ill of the fever."

"I suppose," said the superioress, "that if you read—'a poor and starving English family want a sister to help them,' you would volunteer to go at once."

"Yes," said Sœur Marie, with a smile, "I am quite sure of that; it is the words rich and noble I do not like."

"The rich and noble must be helped as well as the poor," said the superioress. "I will not ask you to go, Sœur Marie, I will keep my promise, but, if you volunteer to do so, I shall be glad."

Sœur Marie stood quite still for a few moments with her arms crossed over her breast, then she said,—

"I will go."

And she little dreamed of what she had undertaken to do.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE bright June sun was shining on the villa, and the squire was looking out impatiently for the new nurse. How they had managed, he could not tell, but Mrs. Gordon was still improving, although the children were still dangerously ill, and Lady Rydal was fading day by day.

The superioress had assured him that the sister should be here as quickly as steam could bring her; still it seemed a long time to him who awaited so anxiously. At last a note came from the convent, saying that the English sister was expected on the morrow, if the squire could drive over and take her back to the villa.

The squire bore a charmed life; he went from one room to the other, he sat for long hours together with his wife, he was never weary of being with the children; bnt no breath of the fever scorched him.

He went in search of Lady Rydal, with the open note in his hands. She looked white and trembling with fatigue; she was bending over little Gordon who had ceased to recognize her.

"Papa," she said, with all the calmness of despair, "my darling boy will never get better."

"Take courage, Elinore; while there is life there is hope, and I have good news for you. We have a new nurse coming to-morrow; I am to drive over and fetch her. I am so thankful—it will relieve you so much."

"I am thankful too," she said. "But oh! papa, is there any hope for Gordon, the child of my heart—the child with his father's eyes?"

"There is always hope while there is life," answered the squire, wearily.

He would have given his life to have saved his beautiful and beloved child from all this trouble and sorrow.

The squire was destined to be very much surprised. When he drove over on the morrow to the convent, and the superioress brought the new sister to him, he was more astounded than he had ever been in his life before.

He saw before him a tall, beautiful woman, stately and

graceful as a queen, yet with the gentle, timid manner of a child—a royal woman, clad in the humble black garments of a nursing sister—a queenly woman, who bowed her head before him, and seemed too shy to speak.

"This is Sister Marie, monsieur," said the superioress, "and she will do her best to help you."

"I will do my best," said a low, sweet voice—ah, so full of tears!—and it touched the squire's heart more deeply than words could tell.

"What manner of woman is this?" he thought to himself. "She looks like a queen; she has the white, fine hands of a duchess, and she speaks like one whose heart has been riven."

"You will find a sick and sorry house, sister," said the squire, looking at the marvellously beautiful face, half hidden by the white veil.

Ah, me! what a face it was!—almost divine in its beauty and its sorrow—dark, magnificent eyes, that were seldom raised, and a mouth of pure and perfect loveliness.

The good squire was the least bit embarrassed by this wonderful beauty. A nursing sister was novelty enough, but a beautiful one was—well, more than he felt the power of imagining. The other two had been fair and comely English women, remarkable for nothing except their exquisite skill and tenderness in nursing. This sister was quite different; she was as stately as some great queen, yet shy and timid as a child. In his perplexity, he turned to the superioress.

"You are sure," he said, "there is no mistake here? This good sister looks, you see, a little like a grand duchess."

The superioress smiled.

"Sister Marie is an English lady," she said, "and they are generally, I believe, of dignified presence; but you will find her as humble as a child."

Still the squire was not quite comfortable: he caught glimpses every now and then of dark eyes that electrified him with their pathetic beauty; still she was so gentle so sweet, that in a short time he began to feel quite at home with her,

It was not a very long drive from the convent to the villa, and when they reached it the squire would insist upon the sister resting and taking some refreshments before she even thought of her work or her patients. In some vague way he felt that she belonged to a different class from the others.

"You have had a long, hot dusty drive," said the squire: "will you take wine or fruit?"

The sister thanked him with a gentle bend of the head.

"Neither." She would take neither.

"I know what you would like," said the squire: "at least the others do, and that is a cup of English tea.'

The most delicious smile curved the beautiful lips.

"I should indeed," she said.

"I knew it!" cried the squire. "They all prefer it. You shall have it at once."

He gave orders for the tea, and his good-natured politeness led him to remain with the sister while it was being made, so that she should not feel lonely.

She was standing at the window admiring the mountains and the sea; there was a far-off look in her eyes, as though her heart and thoughts were elsewhere; perhaps she saw some fair English landscape, and again, in her memory, heard English birds sing.

"A beautiful view," said the squire. "By the way, I have not asked by what name we are to address you."

"I am called Sister Marie," she said, sweetly, and the squire bowed as he would have done to a court beauty or an empress.

"I am Squire Gordon," he said; "but you know my name, of course?"

"No," she replied; "I do not think the superioress mentioned it."

"Names are not matters of much moment to you," he said.

"No," replied Sister Marie, simply. "I have nursed people whose names have never been known to me. Is it your—is it Mrs Gordon who is ill?"

"Yes; my wife, Mrs. Gordon," he replied, "and a very narrow escape she has had. Italian fevers do not suit English constitutions."

"And your little children," she said. "You have two little children ill also?"

The squire looked at her in honest amaze.

"No, they are not my children," he said, "they are my grandchildren."

"Your grandchildren!" she cried in involuntary surprise. "I did not know."

"Two beautiful children," said the squire. "The boy is one of the finest little fellows I have ever seen, and the girl is a perfect little fairy. They are my daughter's children."

"Their mother is living, then, and here with them per-

haps?" she said. "That will make nursing them much easier."

"Their mother is here," said the squire, "and is to my thinking, very ill herself."

The sister raised her dark eyes suddenly to his face.

"Is your daughter—their mother—a widow?" she asked.

"No," replied the squire; "she is worse—they are worse than fatherless. Heaven help them!"

The white veil fell over the beautiful, colorless face, and the sister bowed her head.

"I must ask pardon," she said in a low, clear voice. "We are not allowed to ask questions. Pray forget that I have done so. I was careless, and I had been thinking about the children. It is such happiness for me to nurse little children."

"Now," thought the good squire to himself, "I am quite sure that this is a case of mistaken vocation; this sister would have made a devoted wife and mother—why else should she love little children? The world is full of mistakes."

"If you like children at all," said the squire, "you will love these, they are so patient even in the midst of this horrible fever."

But the sister did not seem quite at her ease; her dark eyes lingered on the distant mountains, but she did not see them; her beautiful face was turned restlessly to the grove of lemon trees, but it was growing colorless—there was something surely in the atmosphere of the room that made her grow pale and faint. The squire thought to amuse her by speaking of the children.

"They were very much attached to the sister who was with them before—the one who lies ill with the fever; little Gordon especially loved her."

There was a moment's silence—such as comes at times before the falling of a thunderbolt—then a voice which the squire hardly recognized asked,—

"What name did you give the little child, monsieur?"

"Gordon," he replied; "he was named after me."

She sighed in such a manner as to remind him of a drowning man gasping for breath, and she was looking at him with, surely, the strangest eyes woman ever wore. What was it?—did some strange fate hang over them? Was there something strange in the atmosphere of the room? Why was her face growing paler, her lips of ashen hue? What was the fear on her face?

Dead, unbroken silence, and the sister had turned her face

to the window again. Again, with eyes that saw nothing, she was looking over mountains and sea; again, with every sense strained, she was striving to quell that which seemed to her madness, and to steady pulses that beat with worse than fever heat.

"I have been hoping all along that my daughter would escape," said the squire, "but now I see no chance of it; if she does not die of fever, she will die of fatigue."

"We must try to spare her all we can," said the sister. and the squire saw white hands drawing the white veil over a colorless face; he only thought that this beautiful stately sister was very sympathetic and very tender; she would just please Elinore—Elinore loved tender hearted women.

"I have not thanked you yet for your kindness in undertaking this long journey," said the squire, "it was so good of you to come."

"I am happy to be of service," said the sister. What was there in the voice that spoke of expectancy and of terrible, unutterable fear? She stood like a woman who awaits sentence of death.

The squire was beginning to feel more at home with her; he had a great admiration for a silent woman. He went on:

"I am so glad for my daughter's sake that you are English; she likes English ladies best; my daughter is Lady Rydal, of Dunwold."

Oh, Heaven, what was the faint sound that rose from the white lips? It was gone in an instant, but it was like the last cry of a broken heart.

CHAPTER XLVII.

"Lady Rydal, of Dunwold," repeated the squire; "but the name is of course quite unknown to you."

There was no answer, no sound, and he did not notice how the white face fell against the window pane; he did not notice how all life seemed to die from that stately figure.

What were the Rydals of Dunwold to her? How would she, a nursing sister from the Rue d'Alsace, know anything of them? Such an idea never crossed the squire's mind for one moment.

"I think myself," continued the squire, "no women are like those of our own land."

But she made him no answer. She did not raise her white face from the cold glass. He talked on, but the woman with the beautiful, colorless face never heard him.

To her it seemed as though the roar of a mighty tempest filled her ears; the blood-red mist swam before her eyes; her heart beat until her whole frame trembled.

"It was the judgment of Heaven upon her," she said to herself, for she who stood there in the dark, humble robes of the sisterhood, her queenly head hidden by the white veil, was the once brilliant Vivian, Countess of Lynn.

What did she know of the Rydals of Dunwold? Oh, Heaven, what did she know?

She was so strangely, wonderfully silent, the squire thought to himself she must be ill, and, with a few words of apology, went away to get her some wine.

When he was gone—when she was quite alone, she raised her colorless face.

"Oh, Heaven help me!" she cried—"help me to bear it My sin has found me out!—help me to bear it!"

Her grief and terror was something wonderful to look upon.

"It is the hand of Heaven," she said, "that has led me here. Now I must look on my own work; now I must see the ruin I have caused. I shall not have the strength to bear it.'

Down on her knees fell the sister in the black robe; the beautiful face was buried in the white hands.

"To the very heart of his home Thou hast brought me, oh, Heaven!" she wept—"to the deserted wife—to the dying children? Oh, give me strength! If I have sinned, I have suffered; and I must indeed have sinned to have suffered so. Now give me strength enough to atone for my sin: give me patience and love to nurse the children back to health and strength—to comfort the sorrowing wife; give me strength to trample myself under foot; let this be the penance for my sins. I will give my life for them!"

Tears, such as she had not shed for many long years, fell like rain from her eyes.

"To think that from the other end of the land I should come to them!" she cried, wringing her hand—"to Lionel's wife and Lionel's children! Oh, Heaven! did I ever dare to call Your will by the name of Fate!"

She rose from her knees when she heard the sound of footsteps. The squire returned with some wine. She had just

risen from her knees, and had time to turn her face to the window again.

"Now, sister," he said, in his bluff, hearty voice, "you must drink this. You had a long, tiresome journey, and it has tired you, I judge from your voice, more than you know. Drink this; I am sure it will refresh you."

He thought to himself, when he saw her face, that she looked more dead than alive, but he ascribed it all to fatigue.

She drank the wine, and was thankful for it; it saved her from falling to the ground.

From the chaos of her thoughts one thing only was clear to her—she was there to do her duty, and she must do it; she must trample self under foot; she must not remember who she was, or who they were; she was there to nurse, to comfort, and to solace them—and she must do it.

Yet as she stood watching the sunlight on the hills, her thoughts wandered to the sands at Calais and the mist that had risen from the sea. She remembered the dark, handsome face of the man she loved; she remembered the very tones of his voice, in which he had told her of his wife and children; how the boy named Gordon loved him, and how they called the baby-girl Blossom; she remembered as though it had happened yesterday the terrible stabs of jealousy that had pierced her heart. It was three years since, and her life had been one long blank, one dream of pain and desolation ever since: but the agony of it all was fresh and new as though it had happened yesterday.

"Men talk of fate," she said to herself.

Why, fate might have been—might be the instrument of Providence: but no blind fate had brought her here. Looking back, from the hour when she had stood on Calais sands, she could retrace every incident in her life, and they all pointed to this one end—bringing her here.

"It is my Nemesis," she said to herself: and then she found that the squire was talking to her.

"I do not think you heard me," he was saying. "I will find Lady Rydal and send her to you; then you can decide with her what part of the nursing you would like to undertake."

"The children!" she cried, in a voice that was like a wail of pain; "let me have the children if you can."

She was alone again, and this time a trace of unconsciousness came over her; she was no longer in the villa with the vine-covered porch; she was on the sands again at Calais, and the wind was freshening the waves, the moon was shining over

the sea, and the man she had loved better than all the world besides was by her side.

"My wife and children," were the words that fell from his lips and spellbound her.

"My wife and children," when she had believed that he belonged to her. Ah, Heaven! the pain the fiery, horrible pain. She woke with a bitter cry; she was still alone—quite alone.

Should she give it up, go back to the convent, and tell them that she was unequal to the task—ask them to let her go back to Paris, and send some one more competent—should she save herself further suffering and do that?

She hesitated for a few minutes.

Lionel's wife and children—the woman whom he had been willing to neglect for her sake, the children whom she had tempted him to desert; yet even she felt that although she had tempted him, and he had yielded to the temptation, he loved wife and children by far the best. Could she bear to see this beautiful wife, whose life she had done so much to blight? Could she bear to see these children whom she had robbed of a father.

Then she remembered the squire's words, that his daughter was worse than widowed, the children worse than orphaned.

"It was evident from that that *Sir Lionel had never returned home;* for all that his wife and friends knew, he was with the Countess of Lynn now, and she marvelled much that he had stayed away. Could it be that he had really loved her as much as she once believed he had done, and had not forgotten his disappointment? Oh, wondrous human love; the very thought of it made her face burn and her heart beat. Oh, wondrous human love, that neither time, absence, distance, neglect, nor cruelty can kill!

Again on her knees fell Sister Marie. This was the love she had forsworn, the love that she had spent long hours and months in bewailing, the love that had been the curse of her life that had destroyed her fair name; the love that had been her destruction and her ruin.

"Ah, Heaven bless me and aid me!" she cried. "Take this love from my heart, round which it creeps like a deadly snake; help me to trample it under foot; give me the victory over myself; help me to atone for my sin. Because my wicked love led him from his wife, let me spend my life in trying to comfort her; because my wicked love took him from his children, let me atone for it by giving my health and strength for them. Oh, Heaven, help me to do this!"

"I am afraid you are not well," said a voice that Sister Marie thought the sweetest she had ever heard.

She turned hastily and beheld a tall and beautiful woman with a peerless face and golden hair—fair as an angel, yet with a story of a great sorrow on her pure, proud face; she looked into a pair of beautiful blue eyes, dim with a great passion of grief, but full of truth and candor, and then she knew, by instinct, this was Lionel's wife. So the two met at last who had crossed each other's lives so cruelly! the two who had loved one man; the two whose lives had been equally blighted by the wrong-doing of the man they trusted.

In one moment Sister Marie recognized "Lionel's wife," but fair and gentle Lady Rydal had not an idea of the identity of her rival.

"I am afraid," she repeated, "that you are not well."

"I hope you will forgive me," said the sister, gently. "I am quite ashamed that you should have found me in tears. I have been looking at the mountains, and, I cannot tell why, but they made me think of home."

"It is quite natural," said sweet Lady Rydal. Then she stepped forward with outstretched hands. "How good of you to come and help us!" she said.

But Sister Marie's eyes fell; she did not dare to touch the white hand; on the other she saw the wedding-ring shining that Sir Lionel had placed there. She did not care to touch that sweet and gracious hand. She felt rather as if she could have fallen at the gentle lady's feet, and cried out for her pardon. Her pale lips answered Lady Rydal in shy and timid greeting; in reality the prayer that went from them was,—

"Oh, Heaven! be merciful to me a wretched sinner!"

CHAPTER XLVIII.

"I AM afraid that you are not well," repeated Lady Rydal, wondering much at the strange manner of the sister. "Perhaps your journey has tired you. My father tells me that you have come all the way from Paris."

"Yes," was the answer, in a low tone of voice. "It is not only that the mountains made me think of home, although there is nothing like them in England."

"You love England?" said Lady Rydal, gently.

"Yes," replied the sister.

Then Lady Rydal looked at the face so darkly beautiful, half hidden by the white veil.

"Are you English?" she inquired.

"My mother was Spanish, my father English," she answered, and her face grew even whiter when she remembered the pure loving young mother who had asked to die looking at her husband's face, and the brave young father who had died on the hills of Galenza.

If they knew what had become of their hapless child!

Lady Rydal could not see the emotions on the beautiful face or the trembling of the lips. Like the squire, her attention was attracted by the white fine hands so perfect in shape and color.

"A lady," she thought to herself, "evidently a lady, who has given her life to the service of Heaven, and the nursing of the sick," and the gentle, pious heart of Lady Rydal bowed before the sister with the white veil—did homage to her—went out to her with reverence and affection.

She thought it so beautiful to give one's life to Heaven.

Then when the sister moved and raised the veil so that she could see more plainly, Lady Rydal saw the wondrous face that had been half hidden before, She could not believe herself. She had seen nothing so fair in her whole life. She did not notice the half-shrinking manner of the sister, who seemed to have some fear that she might be recognized.

The only effect produced on Lady Rydal was to make her more reverential; for such a woman as this, who could certainly have ruled the world by her beauty, to devote herself to the sick and the suffering, was doubly meritorious.

Lady Rydal drew a chair near her own; there was always a kindly grace about her actions that made her lovely.

"Will you sit down, sister," she said, "while I tell you about the children?"

And the two women who were really mortal enemies, who had suffered enough to make them enemies, sat down together to discuss the children.

How those words went to the heart of the childless woman. "Let us talk about the children." Lionel's children, for whom she had renounced him!

"I am very anxious over my boy," continued Lady Rydal, "my little daughter will fight through it, I believe, but Gordon

was ill before we came here; the doctor said he had outgrown his strength; that was one reason why we came here."

The woman listening with a beating heart knows what the other reason was.

"I am anxious over him," continued the fair and gentle lady. "I notice the doctor, Monsieur Antoine, always looks grave when he visits Gordon. He smiles at Blossom and talks to her; but there is no smile on his face when he goes to my son. And, sister," she added, laying her hand on Sister Marie's arm, "sister, my son is my life. You must not think that I love him too much, and that because I love him so, Heaven will take him from me. It is not that; I have reason for loving him so utterly and entirely."

She could not tell a stranger that it was because he had his father's eyes; but that was what she meant. If those beautiful eyes of her son were closed in death, there would be nothing left to remind her of the husband she had idolized and the face she never expected to see again.

Lady Rydal went on,—

"Mrs. Gordon, my mother, is very ill, but she seems to have taken the right turn towards recovery. She will require constant care and great attention. She is well content with Sister Anita and Mrs. Rogers. I thought perhaps you and I could attend to the children.

There was something so wistful and pathetic in the words that Sister Marie looked up with a quick, warm glance of sympathy, which made her so radiantly beautiful that Lady Rydal was startled.

"That is, above all things," she cried, "what I should like —to nurse little children. It has been a dream of mine."

"Do you love children?" asked Lady Rydal, gently. All the hearts of the two women grew nearer together as Marie answered, "Yes."

"I had a lonely childhood," she said; "I hardly remember to have played with a child. Once, and once only, in my life have I been under the same roof with little children; and it is no exaggeration to say that I worshipped them. My heart has been full of the love of little children ever since."

"I think," said Lady Rydal, with one of her loving, gentle impulses—"I think it must have been Heaven that sent you to me." And she did not see how the sister shrank shuddering from her words. "I have longed for some one who loved children to help me," continued Lady Rydal; "for I am quite sure

it is impossible to nurse a child unless you love it. You will try to love little Gordon, sister?"

Ah, me! how the heart of the childless woman went out to her!

"I will love him," she said, "with all my heart; I will give all my skill and strength to him."

"Heaven bless you!" said gentle Lady Rydal; and bending down she kissed the fine white hand that lay outside the black robe—the same white hand that had beckoned her husband from home and from her

"I am so grateful," she said, "and I have more hope now; we will nurse the children together. I have no English servants" she continued, "except Bennet and Rogers; but you speak French and Italian, without doubt?"

"Yes," said Sister Marie; "most of our sisterhood speak several languages; they are compelled to do so if they would be of use. I was in Germany last year for three months with a German baroness. She was three months dying, and she had none but German servants. I was obliged to study the language so as to speak it correctly."

"We have none but French and Italians here," said Lady Rydal. She added, with a sweet, sad smile: "My children have a faint knowledge of many languages, but it is a curious thing that during this fever they have forgotten everything but English. They both spoke French and Italian very prettily, but they do not seem to remember one word; that is why the servants are useless. Shall we go now to see them? But I will show you to your room first; it is near mine and the children's. You will take a few minutes' rest?"

"I should be glad of a few minutes," said the sister.

But it was not for rest; she wanted to be alone; she wanted to wash, with tears of bitter contrition, that kiss so lovingly placed on her hand.

No sword-wound, no barb of poisoned arrow, no sharp sting from a dagger's point, could have pained her as did that kiss; there was no moment in her life when her sin stood so clearly before her as when the woman she had so clearly although unconsciously injured, bent down to kiss her hand. She said to herself that she must be alone, and wash away the kiss with tears of sorrow.

They went together to the room set aside for Sister Marie. The hush of sickness was over the house; the silence was only broken by the singing of the birds and the music of the summer wind among the trees.

"I hope," said Lady Rydal, as she opened the door, "that you will be pleased with the room, Sister Marie."

I should be difficult, indeed, if this did not please me," she replied; and, indeed, the view from the window was one of the utmost magnificence—the grand mountains, with their summits hidden in the clouds, a deep-ravine, half-covered with trees, lay just before the windows.

"Thank Heaven!" cried Sister Maire, "there is nothing here to remind me of England!" And then Lady Rydal left her alone.

Alone—to fall on her knees again with prayers and tears; alone, to raise that hand to heaven whereon the gentle, loving kiss had lain—let that kiss plead for her. Guilty, dishonored, let the kiss of the innocent woman she had wronged plead for her.

Alone—to cry aloud that Heaven would help her, and let her atone for her sin by serving with her very life itself those whom she had unconsciously injured. Then she waited for some minutes to recover her scattered senses. She could hardly realize the fact even now, that she was under the same roof with Lionel's wife and children; that his wife had received her with the utmost kindness; that she was going to nurse his children, the children of whom she had spoken with such deep emotion on the Calais sands. She could hardly realize that the hand of Heaven had led her here. How she had repented of her sin; of her mad, wicked love; of her criminal folly in sending for Sir Lionel; of her sin in leaving her husband.

She had repented with her whole heart, and had resolved to spend her life in repentance. She had thought long and deeply before she decided how that life was to be spent, and then she heard of the nursing sisters. The very thing for which she longed! She would be hidden from the whole world, yet able to spend her life in heroic acts of penance, and so, perhaps, after all, win heaven.

She gave no thought to her wondrous beauty—it had brought no good fortune to her; she gave no thought to the pleasures of the world she had once enjoyed with such keen enjoyment. She flung herself with the energy of her heart and soul into the new life. No sister ever worked harder than Sister Marie.

The only stipulation she made was that she should never be sent to nurse English people, and the superioress to whom she made this application granted it at once.

Looking at the beautiful, high-bred face, she knew there

was a mystery, and she had the good sense not to disturb it. And Sister Marie had persevered in her good life.

Was it any wonder that she paused to ask herself whether it was not the will of heaven itself that she should be there.

CHAPTER XLIX.

A QUARTER of an hour had elapsed before Lady Rydal went again in search of the sister, and during that time Sister Marie had regained her calm. She recognized the fact that, if she were to be of use there, she must forget herself entirely, and devote every thought to the sufferers. She longed, with her whole heart, to know what had become of Sir Lionel: when she parted from him on the Calais sands, she had honestly believed that he would go back to his wife. No harm had been done; his wife would forgive him, and they would be happy again. She had never heard whether he had returned or not; she had said farewell to her old life and all that it held, but she had never dreamed of anything else, except that Sir Lionel had gone home and had forgotten her. She wondered now, with a strange pain, what had happened to him; where he was; why he had never returned home; why his wife and children were here in exile. Should she never know the truth? Was fortune or fate playing with her? Could it be possible that she might be here some few weeks and leave again without hearing of him?

"No," she said to herself, resolutely. "that could not be." It was Heaven that had brought her, unknown to herself, to Sir Lionel's wife and children, and she would not lose her faith.

What if she should see him? At the very thought her heart gave a great leap, her face flushed hotly, her whole frame trembled. See him, for whom her eyes and heart had ached so long. She would be content to close her eyes in death, if she might only look upon his face once more.

So she thinks, and then a rush of memory comes over her. It is against this love that she has striven with the whole of her strength, it is to tear it from her heart and trample it under her feet that she has given herself up to this life of austerity and penance. She has spent whole nights in praying Heaven to help her, to take it from her, to teach her, to forget; and at the thought of meeting him her whole soul was

on fire. So little had she estimated the strength of the strongest passion that sways the heart of man.

"Pray Heaven I may never see him!" she cried. "If —if he came—I would go—I would not look upon his face again."

She steadied the thoughts and the nerves that had been set trembling by that one thought. Then she remembered what the squire had said, "His daughter was worse than widowed." Then there was no chance, no fear of Sir Lionel coming home.

Then Lady Rydal came to see if Sister Marie were ready to begin her work. She looked in mute admiration at the beautiful face with its new light of determination and resolve. Come what might Sister Marie would not yield. She would go now and commence her duties. She would give her life, if needed, in the service of the children whom she had robbed of a father's care.

"You feel better?" said Lady Rydal. "You look better, Sister Marie."

"I am quite well and ready for work," she replied, and they went then to the nursery where the sick children lay, a large lofty, beautiful room, with wide open windows looking over the sea, and the soft summer breeze that came in now was laden with the breath of roses.

There were two little white beds; in the one lay little Blossom, in the other Sir Lionel's son and heir; the fire of the fever had burned itself out and the child lay like a broken lily, white, faint, and exhausted, looking as though she had but little life within her.

"This is little Blossom." said Lady Rydal, gently, and Sister Marie's white veil hid her face as she bent over the child.

"Blossom," said Lady Rydal, "this is a new sister come to nurse you."

The child opened her eyes; she had hardly enough strength to speak, but she tried to raise the fair, small face, as though to kiss her.

"I will take such care of you, little Blossom," said Sister Marie, bending over; and Lady Rydal saw when she raised her head that the tears from her eyes were falling on the child's face.

"What do you think of her, Sister Marie?" she asked, as they went away from the cot.

"I think that, with great care she will recover," said Sister Marie. "I see signs of recovery on her face."

And the white-veiled sister noticed that as they drew near to the white bed where Gordon lay Lady Rydal looked more grave and troubled.

"Gordon is worse than Blossom," she said: "he is quite delirous still, and has the full fire of the fever upon him."

She wondered why, when Sister Marie saw the flushed, restless face, she fell on her knees by the bedside, with a loud cry—a cry that seemed to find an echo in her own heart. The child had looked at her with his father's eyes, and they had pierced her heart.

The fever seemed to be at its height; the boy was not conscious; his beautiful head lay restlessly on the pillow, the beautiful face was covered with a crimson flush and he moaned incessantly for water. He looked at his mother, but did not know her; he looked at the sister, but there seemed to be no sight in his eyes.

"Water—I want water!" he cried; and his lips were so hot and so dry the sound was hardly audible. "Water, water!" was the continual cry. "Water, nurse! I want water?"

The eyes were Lionel's own, and the voice was so like his, that it stirred every fibre of Sister Marie's heart.

"He seems to suffer terribly from thirst," she said. "In Paris for this fever they use a cooling, refreshing drink made from limes and lemons. Shall I make some for him?"

"I should be glad," said Lady Rydal. "We have tried everything."

When, after some short time, Sister Marie appeared again at the bedside with a glass of beautiful cool amber liquid, the child drank it eagerly, and looked at the sister with gratified eyes.

"That has done him good," said Lady Rydal, and something of relief come over the fair, sweet, face.

"You have plenty of ripe fruit," said Sister Marie to Lady Rydal; "I can make some excellent cooling drinks from them; it is part of our training."

In a few minutes there seemed to be something more of order in the room, and Sister Marie said gently,—

"There is too much light. We want a green light. The boy's eyes are dazed."

In a few minutes more the green blinds shrouded the bright golden light of the sun. The boy's eyes closed as though the relief were great for him, and soon afterward he fell asleep. His mother knelt by him, her anxiety so great that

she could hardly draw her breath. Sleep was the one thing needed ; if he could have that all would be well ; but after a few minutes he woke up with flaming cheeks and flashing eyes.

" I want papa ! " he cried ! " Papa !—Papa ! " and with each repetition of the word the sweet, shrill voice rose higher and higher.

The word fell like a thunderbolt between the two women who stood on either side of the child. When Sister Marie heard it her heart seemed to stand still. When Lady Rydal heard it her sweet face grew pale and the tears filled her eyes.

" Papa ! " cried the boy. " I want papa ! "

His head rolled restlessly again on the pillow. Just as he had cried for water before, he cried for papa now. The two looked at each other—their eyes met.

" The sister will wonder why his father does not come," thought Lady Rydal, while Sister Marie bowed her head in most bitter sorrow.

It was owing to her folly and sin that there was no father here to answer the child.

" Papa," cried the little fellow, " I have lost the ball—it has rolled into the river. Will you find it for me ? "

" And now," thought Sister Marie, " I shall know whether he has returned, or if they know anything of him."

The next time the boy called " papa," she looked at Lady Rydal with inquiry in her eyes, and Lady Rydal read the question rightly. She answered it.

" My husband is not here," she said, hurriedly. " Gordon is always calling for him ; he loved him very much."

The white-veiled head bends lower and lower. Whose fault was it that the child cried in vain for the father ?

" I think," said Lady Rydal, wearily, " that has been the hardest thing I have had to bear. For days together the boy does nothing but call for ' papa.' If I could but make him think of something else ! "

" Papa, bring the roses ! " cried the little fellow ; and then in his feverish dreams he fancied his father was there, and he laughed at some jest he believed his father had made.

The sound of the shrill sweet laughter struck both women with awe. It was worse than cries, worse than tears ; and the child evidently thought his father was there.

" Don't hide, papa—don't go away ; stand where I can see you. Nurse me ! "

And the thin arms were outstretched to the phantom father seen only by the fevered brain.

"Take me out where the wind blows—I am so hot and tired, papa. Lift me in your arms. He is going!"

And but for the watchful nurses the boy would have sprung out of bed. It was Sister Marie who restrained him.

"Gordon," she said—"dear little Gordon, you shall go out with papa if you will try and rest now!"

But the child could not hear or understand; he only cried the more that papa was going, and he wanted him.

Sister Marie caught one glimpse of Lady Rydal's white face.

Where was the husband and father who should have been by her side in this the supreme moment of her anguish and distress? Could there ever be pardon or forgiveness for the one who had taken him away?

"You see," said Lady Rydal, when the boy's cries sank into a hoarse murmur, "you see how very ill he is."

"I see, but I do not despair," replied Sister Marie. "Lady Rydal, you look so tired, so worn; I wish you would rest, and trust the children to me; the little one sleeps, and I can manage the boy."

"I should be thankful, indeed, for rest," said Lady Rydal.

She looked at the beautiful face that seemed all tenderness and love as it bent over the child.

"I am sure I can trust you," she said, gently: "I will rest for a few hours—you will take care of them."

"Yes," said Sister Marie, with a strange, sweet smile, "I will take care of them."

"Heaven has sent me a comforter," said Lady Rydal, "in sending you."

And then Sister Marie found herself in the room alone with Lionel's children, still with the same strange, sweet smile on her face.

CHAPTER L.

A FEW more days passed in the greatest suspense; then Mrs. Gordon began to recover more rapidly, and one of the squire's greatest causes of anxiety was removed. The doctor's advice was that she should leave the villa as soon as possible. She would recover both health and strength more rapidly with

change of air. The little Blossom was on the way to recovery, but the dark cloud of danger hung over Gordon.

It was the strangest household; the squire was the only really strong or healthy person in it. Bennet was worn to a shadow with anxiety; nothing went on right; there was no regular time for anything. Rogers, the faithful nurse, was tired out with incessant nursing; the sister in attendance upon Mrs. Gordon was not very strong. Lady Rydal and Sister Marie were always with the child.

The squire learned his lesson of patience in those days. He was wont to ask if any one could tell why so many troubles fell upon him and his. What had he done to deserve such punishment? It served him right, he thought, for coming to Italy; he should have been content to remain at home; nothing ever came of foreign travel but misery of all kinds. He declared that he should thank Heaven when he found himself once more in England, and he resolved that he would never leave home again. The squire liked Sister Marie very much indeed, not only for her great beauty, her sweetness and grace, but because of her wonderful intelligence; she could talk to him on any subject.

It often happened when Lady Rydal went to rest that the squire would go to the nursery, and while Sister Marie sat by the child's side, soothing and tending him, the squire would sit near, watching her gentle, womanly ways, watching the graceful movements of the fine, white hands, listening to the musical murmur of the sweetest voice he had ever heard, and when Gordon slept they had long conversations together.

They talked about everything under the sun, and the squire was delighted. Lady Rydal was clever and intelligent, but she had not the quick, piquant wit of Sister Marie; the squire was delighted in it.

"There is a woman," he would say to himself, "she would have made a queen—an ambassadress—a grand duchess—anything great and famous; yet she is hidden under the guise of a nursing sister.

"She would have made a wife and mother, such as one seldom sees, and she has given her beauty, her talent, her life, to the sick and suffering; a grand woman, a noble woman!" There was no comparison in his mind as to which was the fairer, the better, or the more noble—his daughter or the beautiful lady who was so devoted to her. They were so opposite to each other in every way.

One so fair and gentle, with a sweet, sad face and loving

heart, and tender eyes full of truth and candor; the other with dark, magnificent beauty, a very passion of pain shadowing her face; brilliant, superb even in her humble black dress! No greater contrast, could be imagined; and the strange thing was that despite the wide difference in appearance, character, temperament and disposition, the two ladies grew warmly attached one to the other.

It was Sister Marie's loving devotion to her boy that first won Lady Rydal's heart; she never wearied, never tired; by night and by day she nursed him with care and tenderness unequalled; she seemed to have no thought, no care for herself, she wanted no rest, no change; she was content to be always waiting on him, always caring for him; she was never easy away from him. If Lady Rydal or the squire asked her to leave the room for an hour or two, she was miserable until she returned; her whole heart was fixed upon the boy, her whole time was spent with him, all her thoughts was concentrated on him, for she never by night or by day forgot the voice that had told her, on the Calais sands, how dearly he loved his little son.

She had wearied Heaven with her prayers and tears for pardon. Now, surely, if by dint of care and perseverance she helped to save the boy's life, there would be some hope of pardon—both from earth and Heaven. So she never spared herself, but the struggle was a hard one.

Every hour the boy seemed to grow nearer and nearer death; he was so weak, so exhausted with the dreadful fever that he could not even raise his hand. When the dreadful restlessness of fever came over him, Sister Marie would take him in her arms and carry him to and fro, singing to him in a sweet low voice. When Lady Rydal saw that—saw the wasted arms clinging to hers, the fair head nestling on her breast, her whole heart went out to the beautiful woman who was like a mother herself to the children.

Sister Marie had her punishment. During those long, weary hours, when the child cried incessantly for his papa, she realized what she had done, and it seemed to her little short of sacrilege. Home is a sanctuary and to invade the sanctuary is sacrilege—let man or woman who trifle with the most sacred tie on earth remember this. Vivian, Countess of Lynn, realized it when she heard the feeble moans and cries of the child for its father, and if by laying down her life for the boy, she could have undone what she had done, she would gladly have died.

No word had ever passed between the two ladies over Sir

Lionel. When the child refused to be comforted, and the pitiful little wail for papa broke the silence, they never looked at each other. Sister Marie never uttered a word, and Lady Rydal merely said. "Papa is coming, darling; do not cry."

Once or twice Lady Rydal wondered at the complete self-control of the sister. It would have been so natural if she had said,—

"Why do you not send for his papa, as he wishes so much to see him?"

Fortunate as they were, it would have been most natural had the sister said,—

"Where is his papa?"

But not only did she refrain from asking any questions, but she carefully refrained even from looking an inquiry, and this puzzled Lady Rydal. It seemed unnatural, yet she was most deeply grateful for it.

She thought it came from great natural refinement. Sister Marie must see that there was something strange: she must see that she was not a widow; she wore no widow's cap; she never spoke of a dead husband; no allusion was ever made to husband or father; and Lady Rydal wondered what in the depths of her own heart Sister Marie thought. The same idea occurred to the squire; he had even debated within himself whether it would be wise to give her some hint of the truth, but then he knew his daughter would not like it.

"After all," decided the squire, "it matters little what the sister may think or suspect; when she leaves us, the chances are fifty to one that we shall never meet again;" and sorry enough he was for it, for the squire admired Sister Marie more than any woman he had ever met.

Not one word ever fell on Sister Marie's ears that gave her the least clue as to Sir Lionel's whereabouts; no allusion was ever made to him, his name never was mentioned—he might have been out of the world. She longed to know something of him—whether he had ever written to his wife to ask her pardon; whether he had made any effort to return to her; whether Lady Rydal believed that she was with him. All these things the unhappy lady longed to know, but there was no chance; here in the heart of his home, in the midst of his nearest and dearest, she heard no more about him than she had done in her convent home.

She heard the squire and Lady Rydal speak of Dunwold—of the servants—the tenants of the estate; but there was never even the least mention of Dunwold's master, Sir Lionel Rydal.

There were times even when Sister Marie could not and did not realize her life or her surroundings at all—that she, the beautiful, brilliant Countess of Lynn, should wear the humble dress of a nursing sister—that she should be here, serving the wife and children of the only man she had ever loved, it seemed incredible to her. She had never heard of such a case in real life—she had never read of one in fiction. She wondered at times, with a cold shudder of fear and pain, what would they do or say if ever they knew who she was. All the love, reverence and affection which they showed her now would die—all the kindliness and friendship die. If they knew her they would hate her; the squire would curse her for the evil she had wrought him and destruction to the child he loved. Lady Rydal must loathe her, for she had blighted her whole life: even the children who clung to her would detest and loathe her, if they knew she was the one who had taken their father from them.

"I must be careful," said Sister Marie to herself; "by one unguarded word, by one careless phrase, I might reveal my identity; and then—then it would all beended; there would be no more hope of spending my life in their service."

When the moon shone in through the windows of the sick-room, and she sat by the side of Sir Lionel's son, she made many pictures in her mind. One was always Sir Lionel's return, sudden and unexpected; she pictured him coming up the staircase, opening the door, entering the room; she pictured to herself the joy of the child, and the terrible consequences if Sir Lionel recognized her.

He would recognize her; no disguise would hide her from him. Then what would happen? Would Lady Rydal forgive him? Above all, if she told the truth—told how she left him on the very day of their elopement, and had never seen him since? She would rouse herself with a beating heart and flushed face; she would go to the window, where she could see the white moonlight on the sea; she would raise her beautiful face to the moon, and wonder if ever she should see him again; then, with bitter tears, she would pray to Heaven to forgive her great love—her great sin.

Why was she so unhappy? Why was her life blighted from the time she was left an orphan until now? She asked herself, if Heaven had destined her to be wretched, of what use had her beauty been to her?—of what use her life? She had brought misery and grief to this gentle lady and her children; she had brought no gladness even to herself.

A mad love, a few weeks of a mad love, of a great sinful passion, and she paid the price of it with the whole happiness of her life.

There are some lots in this life mysterious and wonderful; that of Vivian, Countess of Lynn, was one.

CHAPTER LI.

WHILE Lady Rydal lived at the villa, no English newspapers had found their way there; she would not allow them, would not look at them; and her two faithful servants, only too anxious to obey every wish and bow of hers, were particular in carrying out her wishes.

But the squire must have the *Times;* he told Lady Rydal that it would be far easier for him to go without his breakfast than to miss his paper.

"I can understand, Elinore, that you do not care for papers, you do not care to hear of the world or what goes on in it, but I do. I have been a stanch Tory all my life, and I mean to die one; I cannot live without my *Times*, but you need never read it, my dear."

So every morning the *Times* was brought to the villa, and it often happened that the squire took his paper into the nursery to read. At first Sister Marie took little notice of it; she recognized the journal in one moment, and it took her memory to the mornings when Lord Lynn sat so stern and still at the breakfast-table with the *Times* unfolded by his side.

She thought, too, with a passing sigh, how often her triumphs had been registered there. "The beautiful Countess of Lynn;" her presence at court balls, at the opera, at different entertainments, were all commented upon. She remembered the descriptions of her court-dress when she had worn the famous Lynn diamonds.

"Do you ever read newspapers, sister?" asked the squire, seeing that her eyes lingered on the *Times*, and quite misunderstanding her thoughts.

"I have not touched one for many months," she replied; "we see none at the convent. Sometimes a patient will ask us to read, and then we do not refuse; they have no interest for us."

"I suppose not," sighed the squire.

And he thought to himself what a sad pity it was; a woman like this ought to be well up in the politics of the day; but after that he frequently left the paper in the nursery, thinking she might like to read it. One morning she had been persuaded by Lady Rydal to go out for an hour; the night had been long and terrible, the child had suffered greatly, and Sister Marie looked exhausted.

Gordon had fallen into a restless sleep, and Lady Rydal insisted upon Sister Marie going out. She walked down to the beach and then wished she had taken any other direction. The fall of the waves, the wild, sweet music of the sea brought the Calais sands so forcibly back to her mind: she wrung her hands as she prayed for courage to forget, for help to beat back the wild waves of memory that shook her very soul, and then she turned from the sea. Never again would the music of wind or waves seem sweet to her—never more.

There was a strange sense of unrest, a strange spirit of foreboding about her; her heart beat with rapid pulsations.

"I must rest," she said to herself; "there can be nothing wrong. I need have no fear, I can suffer no more; the worst that can happen to any one has happened to me."

Still, though she tried to reason with herself, though she knew that her cup of sorrow was full, she could not rid herself of that terrible feeling of coming sorrow and dread.

Lady Rydal had wished her to remain in the open air for two or three hours, but she longed to get back to the child. The nearest approach she ever had to happiness was when she was with him.

"I will go back to work," said Sister Marie to herself; "I cannot bear my own thoughts."

She went back to the villa, back to the child's room; they had not expected her.

Gordon was still asleep; the Squire and Lady Rydal stood in the deep embrasure of the window. The *Times* lay on the floor; it was evident that the squire had been reading it, and that it had fallen at his feet.

She saw at one glance that Lady Rydal's face was deadly white, and that she had been weeping bitterly. They were speaking so earnestly they did not hear her enter the room.

"What difference do you think it will make, papa?" Lady Rydal asked.

"He may marry her now, or perhaps, or——"

Then the squire paused, for his eyes fell on Sister Marie.

Lady Rydal's glance followed his; bnt evidently she thought the sisters presence no hindrance to their conversation.

"He cannot marry her," she replied. "You forget, papa; it is no more possible now than it was at first.',

"I spoke carelessly," said the squire. "I cannot see that it will make any difference. It may bring her home—take her to England, I mean; it will most probably, and then he will most likely accompany her."

Neither of them noticed that the sister had drawn near to the child's bed and was kneeling by his side, her face hidden in her hands; even if they had observed it, they would have thought it prefectly natural,

It never occurred to either of them that the white-veiled sister had any interest in their conversation, nor did it occur to them to refrain from speaking because she was present.

"I wish almost," said Lady, Rydal, in a tremulous voice. "that it had not happened."

"I am not surprised at all," said the squire. "He was a proud man and it was a terrible blow."

"I wonder." said Lady Rydal, sadly, "if he will come with her. I wonder if ever it will fall to my lot to see her."

"I hope not," said the squire, savagely. "I cannot say but that I should like to see her just for once to speak my mind: it would do her good, and it would do me good also."

"Poor lady!" said the gentle-hearted lady. "Perhaps she has suffered."

"All evil-doers ought to suffer," said the squire, sturdily. "She has brought all this suffering on you. But for her you would be safe and happy in your own home; you would have your husband by your side, your children round you; you would have had no exile, no sickness, no sorrow. I say the woman who inflicted such suffering on her fellow-woman, is accursed of God and of man—accursed!"

Neither of them heard the low moan of agony from the white-veiled sister who knelt by Gordon's bed. Lady Rydal laid her gentle hard on the squire's arm.

"Vengeance is mine and I will repay it, saith the Lord." Father, no need for us to curse her—no need. If she has heart or conscience she knows the curse that she has already brought down on her own head. I think of her with pity, not hate. Oh, how I wish this had never happened—it, will put an end to all the peace even of our sorrow."

And the listener, whose face was hidden by the white veil,

wondered what had happened. Could it be news of *him?* Could it be that he was returning? Yet that was not it, for they spoke of her.

It was quite evident that they both believed her to be still with him—that some event had happened which affected her: evidently she was expected to return to England, and they were wondering if Sir Lionel would come with her. Ah, Heaven! if they guessed even ever so faintly at the truth: if they could know that he and she had parted that night on the Calais. sands not to meet again. She longed that gentle, kindly Lady Rydal should know, that it would surely be some little relief to her. She longed to go to them and ask what had happened, but that would be to betray herself. She must be patient. But where all this time was he? Why had he allowed her all this time to believe that she was with him?

She started, for the squire was by her side: he did not seemed to be surprised that her upturned face was wet with tears—tears were the order of the day at the villa.

"Sister," he said, in a low voice, "I want you to be very kind to Lady Rydal to-day. Do your best to cheer her; she has had news that has made her anxious!"

She could not resist asking, "Is it good news or bad?" He looked at her blankly for a few minutes, then he said,—

"I cannot tell you, for I really do not know,"and then he turned hastily away, leaving her in a fever of curiosity and suspense.

The news must be of him and yet—neither to be good nor bad, what news could it be?

When the squire quitted the room, she rose from her knees and went to Lady Rydal.

"Dear madam," she said, "you are in trouble. Can I help you?"

There was the same maze on her face, as though she did not quite know what the news might mean to her.

"I thank you very much," she said; "but there is no help in this world for me."

"I hope," said the sister gently, "there may be help in heaven!'

And then a message came for Lady Rydal—Mrs. Gordon wanted her. When she had gone, Sister Marie bent down and picked up the "Times," from the floor.

"Whatever the news is, they found it here," she thought.

Her heart beat, and her hands trembled. She could solve the mystery now; she held the key of it in her own hands.

She opened the paper quickly, glanced at the leading news, telegrams from some distant seats of war, leaders on political matters, letters from indignant Englishmen on different grievances. Ah, Heaven! here it was at last—"Death of the Earl of Lynn!"

The letters seemed to swim before her eyes—they grew large and fiery, then she lost sight of them, and her strength failed her. Death of the Earl of Lynn!"

He was dead, then, this husband of hers—dead, believing her to be the most guilty of women—dead, believing that she had been all this time with Sir Lionel—dead, without knowing anything of her repentance!

It was not love that made her fall on her knees with that low cry of pain—she had never loved him; it was that terrible sense of everything being too late—that terrible longing that the dead might return to life, if only for one hour—that terrible sense of wrong-doing that is worse than any pain.

"Death of Lord Lynn!" She collected herself then, and tried to read the rest.

It was a long paragraph, telling first of the birth of Luton Earl of Lynn, of his marriage, and his death; he had been ill for many weeks, and died at Lynn Royal. There was some allusion to the unhappy termination of his marriage. "Lady Lynn had not been heard of for some time, but the late earl had left her a handsome income;" and when she read those words. the eyes of Vivian, Countess of Lynn, filled with tears.

CHAPTER LII.

Vivian, Countess of Lynn, stood long with that paper in her hands, trying to realize the difference those few words made to her. She was a widow now; the chain that had bound her was loosened forever—not this time by her own hand, or by the hands of men, but by the hand of Heaven.

She was free, she who had been bound in shackles which she herself had tried to undo—free! The world was before her; she could go back to it if she would. She had taken no vows when she joined the sisterhood; doubtless she told the superioress why. She wore the dress and kept the rule; perhaps no sister worked harder or did more; but, as the wife of

a living husband, she could take no other vows. Now she was free to take them if she would, if she liked. And, with the paper still in her hands, she stood wondering should she do so.

She remembered so well seeing a sister professed in Paris, and the solemnity of the scene had struck her. How the fair young novice came into the church, clad in a glittering vesture of white and gold, a wreath of summer roses on her golden hair. A smile like the light of Heaven on her fair young face. The vesture of white and gold was exchanged for the coarse black dress, the wreath of summer roses for a crown of thorns! Should she give her beauty and her life in the same fashion? She could if she liked—she was free, for Lord Lynn was dead.

Now she wished she had acted differently. She had spent these years of absence well: she had devoted herself to good works; she had prayed, thought, repented, nursed the sick, helped the poor. She could not reproach herself with one vain or idle hour after she had left the sands at Calais; but no one knew it.

She had allowed herself to fall under the imputation of sin; she had allowed every one to think and believe that she was living the whole of this time with Sir Lionel Rydal, and herein she knew that she had done the greatest wrong she could do. Not only must we avoid evil, but we must avoid the appearances of it. Heaven knew, and she knew, that these years had been full of regret, repentance, and good work; but the world believed she was still with Sir Lionel Rydal. She had given every reason for it to be believed, and she realized more strongly than ever that her great wrong consisted in putting on the appearance of evil.

Then her thoughts grew even more solemn. She wondered if the earl knew the truth now; if he had gone to the bright heaven above, from whence saints and angels know what is passing here below. If so, he would know that she was innocent of everything except great folly; he would know that she had repented of running away, and had stopped half-way; he would also know the reason why.

She could hardly realize yet what had happened—that she was free. She could return to the world if she liked; she could prove her own innocence, if she tried. She was sanguine enough to believe it. And then—well, then she had youth, beauty. She had money—she could take her place again. No need of the coarse, black robe or the crown of thorns if

she went back to the brilliant, laughing world. Once more it seemed to her that her life lay in her own hands.

Yet it all seemed so long ago! What was the pretty song she had sung? She remembered it so well; it was called

"ONE SUMMER MORNING.

"It is but a little while ago;
The elm trees have scarcely begun to droop away,
The sunbeams strike the elm trunks just where they struck that day;
Yet all seems to have happened long ago.

"And the year rolls round, slow, slow;
Autumn will fade to winter, and winter melt in spring,
New life return again to every living thing,
Soon, this will have happened long ago.

"The bonnie wee flowers will blow,
The trees will reclothe themselves, the birds sing out amain,
But never, never, never will the world look again
As it looked before this happened, long ago."

What brought these sweet, sad words to her now? Vague, curious memories came over her. The blow had been so sudden it had bewildered her. The newspapers spoke of the Countess of Lynn—why, she standing here in the sunlight, watching the grand shadows on the mountains, listening to the wind as it stirred the pines and the myrtle, she with the coarse, black robe and veil, she was the Countess of Lynn. Why was she haunted with memories of sweet, sad song? The grand mountains vanished, she was standing in the balcony that overlooked a swift-flowing river, Sir Lionel was by her side, and he asked her to sing. The words came back to her as if she had sung them but yesterday:

"Oh, heart, my heart she said, and heard
His mate the black bird calling,
While through the sheen of the garden green
May rain was softly falling,
Aye, softly, softly falling.

"The buttercups across the field,
Made sunshine rifts of splendor;
The round snowbud of the thorn in the wood
Peeped through its leafage tender,
As the rain came softly falling.

"Oh, heart, my heart, she said, and smiled,
There's not a tree of the valley,
Or a leaf, I wis, which the rain's soft kiss,
Freshens in yonder alley,
Where the drops are ever falling.

"There's not a foolish flower in the grass,
Or a bird through the woodland calling,
So glad again, of the coming rain,
As I of these tears falling
These happy tears, down falling."

And then she remembered how Sir Lionel had bent his handsome head over, had looked at her with laughing eyes, and said,—

"You may weep if you will, if only I may kiss the tears away."

Then from the depths of her heart she cried out,—

"Oh, Heaven, in pity take such thoughts and memories from me! He never was mine! It is all sin!—sin!—sin!"

The paper fell to the ground, and she stood there wringing her hands. Suddenly a faint little voice called "Sister!"

In a moment all was forgotten except little Gordon. She forgot that she was Countess of Lynn, that she was a widow, that once more she held the balance of her life in her hands. She thought only of him, and flew to him gently. She knelt by his side and asked him what did he want.

"I want you, sister," he said, and two small burning hands crept round her neck. "I want you, Sister Marie. I am frightened."

"What at, Gordon?" she asked, almost afraid to ask what that shadow over his face meant. "What frightens you?"

"I do not know," he answered; then he said plaintively: "It is worse to be frightened at nothing than when something really comes; is it not, sister?"

"I think it is, Gordon," she replied.

The child looked earnestly at her with his bright, solemn eyes.

"Sister Marie," he said, "were you in trouble when you were standing by the window there? I was watching you all the time.'

"Yes, little Gordon. I was in bitter trouble then."

"I thought," continued the child, "that sisters never had any trouble—that trouble only comes to ladies like mamma."

"Trouble comes to each one of us," said Sister Marie.

"Will it come to me and to little Blossom?" he asked,

wonderingly, and Sister Marie bent her head before she answered the question. She had brought already on those children's head the greatest trouble that life could hold—the shadow of disgrace and shame.

"Sister Marie," whispered the boy, drawing the beautiful face down to his own, "I am so glad to have you alone now that I can talk; I do not like to talk to mamma, she cries so, and I cannot bear to see her tears. You will not cry?"

No; tears were all useless to her, they would never ease the burning pain that by night and by day never left her.

"I want you to tell me something, sister," he said; and she saw a bright, steadfast light shining in his eyes. "I am not at all frightened," he continued. "You have told me so much about the flowers that grow in heaven, and about the little angels with white wings, that I want to see it. You said the Great King who sits on the jewelled throne loves children."

"So he does," said Sister Marie.

"You told me that if I died, and went to heaven, He would hold out His arms to me, and say 'Welcome.'"

"So he will," she answered.

"I want you," said the child, bravely, "to tell me if I am going to die. The doctor shakes his head, and mamma cries. Does it mean that I am going to die? I have been lying here so long—it seems to me so long. I am sure that I have forgotten my lessons and all my games. Is the end of it that I am going to die? Do tell me, sister."

"I cannot, my little Gordon—if I could I would. You are a brave boy, and not frightened to die; but I cannot tell you. You may die, and soon see the lovely flowers blooming in heaven, or you may live to be a big, strong man, and comfort mamma."

The child's face brightened.

"I think," he said, "I should like that best—to comfort mamma."

He was silent for a few minutes, then again he drew her face down to his.

"Sister Marie," he said, "I love you very much, very much indeed, and I want to ask you something else——

"Do you know anything about papa? I—I loved him so!" he cried, with a great tearless sob. "He was so big and so beautiful, my papa. I used to ride on his shoulder. I loved him so. And all at once he went, and I never saw him again. He did not die, for Blossom never had a black dress, and he never came back. They will not let me speak to

mamma about him. She cries always, and nurse says she does not know. If I am to die—oh, Sister Marie, find out for me before I die where he is! Do you know anything about him? Have you heard any one speak of him? Mamma thinks I have forgotten him; but no, I could never forget him. Do tell me!"

Her face had grown deathly pale, a great shadow of pain filled her dark eyes.

"I only know, little Gordon, that—that papa went away on a long journey."

"Yes; but why—why—why did he leave mamma and us? We all loved him. Mamma almost died when he went. She does not know why. I heard her say so one day."

She fell into a passionate fit of weeping and sobbing. She clasped the child in her arms, and covered his face with kisses and tears.

"I cannot tell you why he went," she said; "but he will come back, I am quite sure. He will come back to mamma and to you."

"But why do you cry?" asked the child, with wide-open, wondering eyes.

Oh, Heaven!—for an answer to that question—why did she cry?

Turning suddenly, she saw that Lady Rydal had returned to the room, and was watching her in silent wonder.

CHAPTER LIII.

Lady Rydal looked at Sister Marie in undisguised wonder, in silence for a few minutes, then she went up to the bedside.

"What is the matter?" she asked. "Is Gordon worse?"

"No, mamma; I have been asking sister if I were really going to die, and that made her cry."

"Die, my darling!" cried Lady Rydal. "Why do you speak of such a thing?"

She flung herself on her knees by the side of the little white bed. There was a strange light in the child's eyes, a peculiar look on his face which alarmed her. It was not that he seemed worse, but the brightness was not of earth; so they knelt on each side of the fair child, the two women who loved him so

well. Sister Marie's face was wet with tears, Lady Rydal was pale with new and vague fears.

"Is he worse?" she whispered to the silent, black-veiled figure; but little Gordon's sharp ears caught the words.

"I am not worse," he replied; "but I feel light and bright all over."

The two women looked at each other with wondering, anxious eyes; then the child opened his eyes, and drew his mother's face down to his.

"Mamma, I want to speak to you," he said; "but promise me that you won't cry. I want to say it so much, but I cannot if you cry."

"I will not, Gordon; say what you will," said Lady Rydal.

The little hands tightened their clasp round her.

"I want papa," he whispered; "I must have papa. If I have to die, and have to live with the angels, I cannot go until I have seen papa; and if he would come only for three minutes, and kiss me, I should get well," and the words pierced the hearts of both women as with a hot sword.

"Send for him, mamma," said the child, pleadingly, while his eyes seemed to grow larger and brighter. "I am sure he will come if he knows that I have sent for him; he loves me. Tell him Gordon is ill and wants him—*Gordon*, not little Blossom; she does not remember him as I do. Mamma, my eyes are so heavy; they would rest if you promised to send for papa."

The two looked at each other, and it was hard to say in which beautiful face lay the deepest pain.

"I lie here," persisted the child, "and dream about him. They all told me I must not tell you about it, but you will not cry. I lie and think about him. I think I can hear him coming upstairs—and he stands there at the open door, looking at me, and smiling; then I think I hear him say, 'Well, little Gordon,' and mamma, I jump up to go to him, and I fall back here; then my head aches, and I find it has all been a dream—there is no papa. If I could kiss papa, I should get well."

Still no answer. Sister Marie's face was hidden by the white sheet, and Lady Rydal seemed to be stricken white and dumb.

"Mamma," said the child, softly, "will you promise?"

From her heart there went up a cry to Heaven.

It seemed to her that no woman had ever been so hardly tried. Here was her child, sick unto death and crying out for his father, and she, deserted and abandoned, could not even

tell him where that idolized father was. A woman must be in a similar position to understand it.

"Will you promise, mamma?" the boy repeated. "Send for him. I know he has gone to some far-off place; but never mind, sent word to him that Gordon wants him, and he will come. I have never sent a message to him before—never since he went away," and the little fellow seemed to think that a fact of great importance.

It is a pity that every man or woman temped to think lightly of marriage vows, to play with fire, to flirt, and to seek admiration, to lure each other into cruel and irremediable wrong could not witness that scene. It is one thing when a flirtation, perhaps harmless for the moment, begins under the influence of music, the perfume of flowers, the brightness of a hundred lamps; it is another thing when it culminates in dishonor and leads to such a scene as this.

These thoughts passed through the mind of Sister Marie; then there came back to her a vivid memory of the time when she had first met Sir Lionel; of the ballroom with its lights and flowers, and this was the end.

She raised her head and looked at Lady Rydal.

"Sister Marie, I—I am afraid he is worse. I have never heard him talk in this way, and—see!"

The beautiful little face was losing its brightness now, and the large, bright eyes were growing dim.

"I am so tired," cried the child. "Oh, mamma, promise me. Remember the message. 'Gordon wants papa.'"

Again Sister Marie looked at Lady Rydal, her lips rather than her voice formed the words "Promise him."

"My dear little Gordon," said Lady Rydal, bending over him, "I promise you."

The child tried to kiss her, but his hands fell back.

"I am so tired," he said, piteously. "Sister Marie, carry me; and mamma, darling mamma, make haste."

She left him because she could bear it no longer. The boy thought she had gone to send for his idolized papa, whereas she had gone to cry to heaven for help. She did not know where he was, where to send; for him she could form no idea of what part of the world he was in; how could she send for him; what was she to do?

She could not refuse little Gordon's prayer. She might write to Mr. Norton, and see if he had any news, or if Sir Lionel could be traced. But this would be the work of weeks, perhaps months, and Gordon wanted him now.

She went back to the room. Sister Marie was walking up and down, holding the boy in her arms, singing to him in a sweet, low voice. At last she laid him down on the bed.

"He is asleep," she whispered; "and he will sleep now for hours."

They placed the tired sleeping child, quite at his ease, shaded his face from the light, and left him. They went together to the window, where the paper telling the news of Lord Lynn's death lay on the floor; neither stooped to raise it, neither affected to see it, although to each just at that moment it was the very centre of their thoughts.

Lady Rydal sank back in her easy-chair, Sister Marie stood by her side; they were silent for a few minutes, both longing to speak, yet neither of them knowing how to begin.

"Do you think the child worse, Sister Marie?" asked Lady Rydal at length.

"No: these are restless fits; he had one yesterday. While you were resting, I carried him up and down the room for more than an hour. He grows quite exhausted, and then sleeps well."

"Do you think, now, that he will get better?" asked Lady Rydal; "it seems to me there is less hope than there was."

Then Sister Marie said to herself that she would break this long silence—that she would venture to utter the name that had never since her entrance to the house crossed her lips.

"I think," she said, gently, "he is wearing himself out with this fancy."

"What fancy?" asked Lady Rydal, hurriedly.

"The desire to see his father," replied Sister Marie. Her voice trembled, but she went on bravely: "I am afraid he will never rest until it is granted."

"Now," she said to herself, with a quick, beating heart, "now I shall know something of him, now I shall hear where he is" But Lady Rydal made no answer; her fair face grew more troubled and sad.

If they had but known each other—the two so strangely brought together; if the veil that hid them from each other had been torn aside; if Sister Marie could have asked frankly, "Do you know anything of him?" and Lady Rydal have answered, "I have heard nothing since he left," it would have been another matter.

Lady Rydal was silent. Sister Marie continued:

"Some children have those passionate affections, those great loves, and they seem to me greater, truer, and deeper

than the loves of grown people. Little Gordon has evidently such a love for his papa,"

The word dropped from her lips like lead—she had nerved herself to utter it at last. If Lady Rydal had not been so absorbed in her own sorrowful thoughts, she must have noticed the peculiar sound of that word.

Sister Marie took courage. It had seemed to her that when she first alluded to Sir Lionel to his wife she must fall down dead; but she was still living. She had spoken of Sir Lionel as the child's father, and the fire of her pain had not killed her.

"I think myself," she added, gently, "that if the child's desire could be gratified, he might recover; but unless it be gratified, I do not know what to think."

Then Lady Rydal looked at her with piteous eyes.

"Does my boy's life depend upon his seeing his—his papa?" she asked.

"I am afraid so," was the grave reply.

"Then Heaven help me, for I fear he must die!" she cried. "You have been so good to us, Sister Marie," she continued; "You are not like a stranger—you have been our best and truest friend. I never thought of mentioning these things to you, but I must do so now. You must have noticed something strange in our household—something different from any other——"

"Dear Lady Rydal," said the sister, gently, "do not tell me anything which distresses you."

"I must tell you!" she cried, quickly. "I would not if it could be helped. You must not think I let my boy die without an effort to save him. I trample all my pride, my wrongs, my outraged love under my feet; I forget everything but that my child is in danger, and calls for his father. Oh, Sister Marie, pity me, the most helpless, the most wretched of women! My child cries for his father, but he can never see him; he has gone away from us; he—he left us—he forgot us; we are nothing to him now. You, living always in a convent, you have never heard of such a terrible crime; it is common enough in the world. He left me and his little children. I do not know where he is; he went quite suddenly. Some day when I am stronger, I will tell you, my good and faithful friend, all about it. He went away, and I have never seen or heard of him since."

It seemed to the listening woman that the terrible beating

of her heart must be heard—that the very air around her throbbed with fire.

"Do you not know where he is?" she asked in a low, smothered voice.

"No; I have heard no word of or from him," she replied, wearily. "I have died many deaths since he left me. I have promised Gordon to send for him, but do not know where to send. The only thing I know is that he must be living, or I should have heard of his death. I do not know how or where to reach him. I am afraid little Gordon can never have the desire of his heart."

But Sister Marie flung herself on her knees, and covered Lady Rydal's hands with kisses and tears.

"Do not say that!" she cried. "God is too good—He will send back the father to the child."

CHAPTER LIV

NIGHT has fallen over the villa. It is Sister Marie's turn to watch over the sick child, and Lady Rydal is supposed to rest. But no rest comes near her; the cry of the child rings forever in her ears. What can she do?

If she knew where to find him she would forego everything and ask him to come, only to see Gordon. He need not see her; she can shut herself in her room; she could leave the house for a few hours—she could, and would do anything for Gordon.

She remembered once, when she was a child herself, ill with some simple malady, she could not bear any one near her or with her but the squire. She could see herself again, a little child, lying in those strong, loving arms, crying out and resisting when any one came to take her from him. She understood the child's passion of love and longing for the handsome young father who had been so kind and indulgent to him. They had sent her to her room to rest and sleep; she was sitting at the open window, watching the moon and the stars—watching the far off mountain peaks and the nearer grove of orange trees.

The moon shone bright and clear. Perhaps it looked down in pity on the fair face so unutterably sad. What a splendid,

beautiful world it was! and somewhere out in that beautiful world was Lionel.

The wind stirred the great green leaves and the blossoms of the lemon-tree. She thought of many things—if she could but give a message to this perfumed summer wind—if she could but let him know that Gordon was so nearly dying and wanted him.

For many long weeks past, since sickness and death had been so near them, she had tried not to think of her husband; to keep herself from dwelling on his face and figure; to forget for a time the sound of his voice; but memory returned now with redoubled force. She saw the handsome, debonair face, the laughing eyes, the beautiful mouth; she could hear every tone of his voice. She bent forward until the cool, fragrant air kissed her face, and then the love and woe of her heart broke into words.

"Oh, Lionel, where are you?" she cried—"where are you? I cry to you, and you do not hear me; the child cries to you, and you do not hear him. Where in this cold wide world are you?"

And the only answer that came to her was the whisper of the wind, and the faint murmur of the distant water.

What should she do? Her husband's bankers must have his address; she would not ask it, but she would send a few lines to him and they could forward it. It would not look then as though she had written because she wanted him; it would be all for Gordon. She would write just these few lines:

"Gordon is dangerously ill, and they tell me he will never get well unless his longing to see you is gratified. Will you come to see him?"

Surely, if she wrote that, and his bankers knew where he was, they would send it,—a child's cry, a child's prayer. It was not from herself; she would never write and say, "I am dying; come to me." But what if Lionel refused the prayer; what if the "beautiful, guilty partner of his flight" would not let him come—kept him chained to her side; what if he disregarded the letter? Then she felt that she could never forgiv herself for having made it.

What was wrong with her? She had been looking at the moon with quiet eyes, and suddenly there was a blood-red mist before them; she had been listening to the whisper of the wind and suddenly the roar of many waters seemed to fill her ears; she had been sitting in her chair, and now she was lying, almost gasping on the ground. What had happened to her? There

was a terrible pain, that was not so much pain as weariness in her limbs. It was with difficulty she raised herself.

"I must have fainted and have fallen to the ground," she thought. "I have been reflecting too much."

For a few moments she could not remember whether she had written the letter, or had only thought of doing so; whether she had received an answer or dreamed it.

"I will try to forget it now," she said, "and sleep; then in the morning I will do just what he advises me."

Always a rock of refuge was the good squire to his daughter.

It was a strange sleep, and did not in the least refresh her, her dreams were so vivid; and they were all of Lionel—of Lionel as he was in the happy days of their love. More than once she woke and found herself singing a verse of her favorite song:—

"'Oh, murm'ring trees! oh, fragrant breeze!
Oh, waving whispering limes!
Oh, there to be again with thee,
My love of olden times!'"

She could not understand her own sensations at all; her head was heavy, her eyes were dim. She never thought of the fever: she had been so fearless and brave all though, that the thought of infection never came near her. She rose, but with difficulty; and her first visit was to her idolized child. She thought Sister Marie looked very ill.

"I do not see any change in him, either for better or worse," said the sister. "He has lain the whole night asking for his papa."

"He shall have him if it be a human possibility," said Lady Rydal, and she went in search of the squire.

She found him in the pleasant apartment they had set aside for a breakfast parlor. He uttered a little cry when he saw her face.

"You are ill, Elinore,s" he said.

"No. I want to consult you, papa. I am not ill, but I have not slept well."

It was strange how, through all her conversation, it seemed as though some other person stood by her side singing these words,—

"Oh, there to be again with thee,
My love of olden times!"

And the fancy was so strong that once or twice she held up

her hand to silence the singing voice. She not notice how her father watched her, or the silent dismay of his face.

"I want to speak to you about Gordon, papa," she said; "he is very ill, and longs for Lionel." She spoke quickly, as though she had a disagreeable task to perform, and wanted it over. "Sister Marie thinks it would save his life if he saw his papa, and she fears that the fever and fret of his longing will destroy him if he does not."

"And what do you think!" asked the squire.

"I think the same thing," she replied. "I believe honestly that if the child saw his father he would live."

"His father is the greater——"

The squire began to storm; but she laid her white, burning hands on his lips.

"Hush!" she said. "Forget he is my husband—remember only that he is Gordon's father, and that Gordon cries for him. What must I do papa?"

She stood before him, so white, so weary, so full of sorrow, with a wringing of her hands that told of the grief within, remembering what she had been in the days of her beauty and happiness, his very heart seemed to die within him.

"What do you want to do, my dear?" he asked abruptly.

"I ought to send for him," she answered, slowly.

The squire's face flushed hotly; the veins, swollen like whipcord, stood out on his forehead.

"Heaven knows," he said. "I love little Gordon; but I am not sure whether I would not rather see him die than have to send for that villain to save him. It is but a sick, fevered fancy, Elinor. Can he not be cured of it?"

"We have both tried," she replied, "but it seems to grow with him. Sister Marie tells me he has lain awake all the night crying for his papa. You believe me, father, it is not I who send him; Iwill not send without your sanction; and when he comes—if he should come—I will not see him if you think it better not."

"I would rather cut off my head and my hands," said the squire, "than send for him! Why can't the child be satisfied? He ought to have been told that his father was dead."

"Oh, papa!" cried Lady Rydal, as she recoiled from him, "what a most terrible thing to say."

"It is true," cried the squire, "quite true! The man is dead—socially speaking. Would the boy be satisfied with me?"

"No," she replied, "we have done all we could, but the

longing seems to have passed into a fever. I am sure that although the child has said nothing to me all this time, because he has been told not to do so, his heart has been with his father."

"The greater pity!" cried the squire. "Does Sister Marie think he ought to be sent for?" he asked.

"She gives no opinion, but she thinks it would save his life," replied Lady Rydal.

Suddenly Mr. Gordon looked up with an expression of relief.

"We are quite forgetting one thing, Elinore," he said; "how can you send for him? Even if we decide it should be done, it would not be possible. We do not know where to send. I myself have not the faintest idea whether he is in Europe. Asia, Africa, or America, and I care nothing. I do not see how we are to reach him?"

"Send the letter to his bankers and ask them to forward it; we need not ask for his address at all."

The squire's face fell.

"That seems possible," he said. What is the matter, Elinore?"

"Nothing," she replied, with a startled look on her face. "Nothing. I thought some one was singing in my ear. Then you think I had better write, papa?"

"I hate the thought of it," stormed the squire. "I cannot endure the idea."

"We cannot stultify nature," she said, gently. "We cannot help the child's love for his father."

"I—really, after all Elinore—I see no use in it," said the squire. "You say the little fellow lies there in great peril, and your honest belief is that the fever of his longing for his father will kill him, while you believe just as honestly that if his papa came to him he would recover?"

"I do," she said, earnestly. "I believe now that it is more the longing for Lionel that keeps him from recovery than the fever."

"I yield to the argument," said the squire; "but you see, Elinore, it will be quite useless for you to humiliate yourself. We have no idea in what part of the world he is, and depend upon it, long before the bankers could get the letter to him, little Gordon will either be—better or worse. He will either die without seeing him, or get better without it. In all probability it will be either three or six months before he receives it. Then he has to travel home from whatever part of the world

he is in. I do not see the use of sending it. It is not as though ne—I shall never call the fellow by a decent name—it is not as though he were there—in London."

"But, papa," she said, gently, "in any case, we should have done our best—our very best. Though Lionel left him, Gordon is still his son and heir. I am quite sure that we ought not to let him die without trying to let his father know his state."

"I yield," said the squire. "What shall you write, Elinore?"

Again the same startled look came over her face.

"I cannot help thinking that some one is singing in my ear, papa," she said.

"You are tired, my dear. You want rest," he said, gently.

She sat down at the table and wrote,—

"To Sir Lionel Rydal—Gordon is dangerously ill, and wants to see you. Can you come?

"E. R."

Not another word, not one trace of the passionate love, the longing and despair that overpowered her.

"That will do, papa," she said, showing it to him. "If—if anything happens to my Gordon he will see it in the papers, and then he will know that he need not come.',

"If she returns to England," said the squire, "he will come with her, and then he will get the letter sooner than we anticipate."

"We will leave it in the hands of Heaven," said Lady Rydal. "I believe Heaven put into the child's heart the longing for his father; it has not been in vain."

When the squire took the letter from his daughter's hand, the touch of it was like fire,

"I am sure you are ill, Elinore," he said; but before he had time to finish the words, Lady Rydal fell on the ground at his feet.

CHAPTER LV.

The worst had happened that could happen. In his hurry and agitation the squire even forgot to send the letter, and, but that Sister Maria found it the day afterward, when she was looking for something else, and sent it off, it would never have gone at all, for the squire was stricken with horror and dismay. His beloved daughter, the joy of his heart, the very light of

his eyes, was stricken with the terrible fever that had wrought such havoc in their houshold. She had been so fearless; she had never thought of infection; she had never thought of herself at all since Mrs. Gordon was first taken ill; and now, all at once, as it seemed, she was in the very midst of one of those terrible and malignant fevers that are so frequent in hot countries.

Fever in England is a terrible thing, even with sharp frost to cool the air, but in warmer climes the visitation is far more horrible. Who knows the source of those poisoned, malarious odors? They seem sweet and pleasant, like the breath of dying leaves and flowers; they are as subtle as sweet, and deadly poison is swallowed before it is perceived.

Lady Rydal had thought little of herself; all the strange sensations that came to her were, she thought, the result of over fatigue; she had not thought of fever, and now she was prostrate.

It was then that Sister Marie showed what devotion could do: she seemed to live without sleep, and almost without rest. Even the squire remonstrated with her, and told her that she would kill herself. She looked at him with a calm, grave smile.

"I shall not mind that," she said, "if my life can save Lady Rydal's."

"I wonder what the secret of that woman's life is?" he thought to himself, as he watched the beautiful, sad face.

Dr. Antoine pronounced Lady Rydal's case to be the worst yet.

"The boy cannot be moved," he said, "but I strongly advise you, milord, to take madame and the little girl away; they will certainly have a relapse if they remain here."

At any other time the squire would have remained to fight a battle over that word, "milord," for he detested it, but this time he let it pass without comment. He could not bear the idea of leaving Elinore. He looked up with a haggard face.

"If I am to lose my daughter," he said, "I may as well die with her; I cannot live without her."

"You may have others to think of," said the doctor, "besides yourself; there is madame and the little one, I advise you to take them to St. Louis, and find nice, cheerful apartments for them there. You can come to and fro yourself, and you must have another sister; this one is a marvel of endurance, but she cannot go on much longer."

So the squire had once more to give in. He took Mrs.

Gordon and little Blossom to St. Louis, where he found comfortable rooms for them, and he spent his whole time going to and fro. It was not a difficult task to nurse Lady Rydal. She was too weak for any exertion; she was as weak as a child. The fever had all its own way with her; she had no strength to fight with it or resist it.

A strange thing was that as Lady Rydal grew worse, Gordon grew better, and Sister Marie did pause at times to ask herself if she had done a wise thing in sending that letter to the post.

Now it became a question of life or death for Lady Rydal. For many days she had lost consciousness, and talked incessantly, but it was always in a low, sweet voice that distressed no one, and always of Lionel. She never remembered that he had left her; all the pain and the sorrow of the last few years had vanished. She was Elinore Gordon once more—a girl at home—a girl adoring her father, rebelling against her stepmother, and finally loving Sir Lionel. She seemed to forget that she had been married; she remembered only the early happy days of her young love, and her gallant young lover. How often the refrain came from her lips—a low, sweet song, unearthly in its beautiful sadness,—

> "Oh, murmuring trees! oh, fragrant breeze!
> Oh, waving, whispering limes!
> Oh, there to be, again with thee,
> My love of olden times!"

She sang it over and over again, until Sister Marie knew every word by heart. It was then, while listening to all the treasured secrets of that gentle, loving heart, that Sister Marie understood how this fair and tender woman had loved her husband; it was then that the blackness of her crime came home to her, and she realized what a horrible thing it was to lure wife from husband or husband from wife.

"It is beyond pardon," she cried, "for the evil results can never be undone or changed. I lured this woman's husband from her—I took him from his children—all the misery of this household has been caused by me! Yet how little I thought of it, and how little I knew what I was doing!"

She longed for a voice which should fill the whole world—which should warn young wives to take care at the beginning—to avoid all dangerous friendships.

During those days Sister Marie wearied Heaven with her tears and prayers.

"My life for hers, oh Heaven!" she would cry; "I would give it so gladly. Let me die, and let her live!"

The doctor and the squire said there had never been such nursing. The three weeks that the fever lasted wore slowly away. Mrs. Gordon was quite well now, little Blossom's face was blooming, but Gordon was white and worn to a shadow, always with the same cry on his lips—that he wanted papa.

As Lady Rydal's strength wore away, her reason returned. Sister Marie, taking her place by her bedside one evening, saw the clear light of intelligence in the blue eyes. Lady Rydal held out her thin, wasted hand to her devoted nurse.

"Have I had the fever?" she asked.

"Yes," replied Sister Marie, "you have had it, dear Lady Rydal."

"How long have I been ill?" was the next question.

"More than three weeks," was the answer.

"How is Gordon?" she asked.

"He is better," said Sister Marie: "not well, but better."

The beautiful blue eyes asked yet another question. Sister Marie read it there, and did not know how to answer it. The wistful expectation of those eyes was terrible to her.

"Has anything happened?" asked Lady Rydal in a faint whisper. "Has any one been to see Gordon?"

"No; nothing has happened; no one has been to see Gordon," she replied.

Lady Rydal lay quite silent for some time, then she said,—

"Sister Marie, put out that lamp, dear, and let us see the moonlight. It will not hurt me."

"No; it will do you good. The air to-night is as sweet as though the whole land were covered with roses."

"Will it hurt me to talk?" asked Lady Rydal. "I want to get well quickly. I want to see Gordon."

"I will not let you hurt yourself," said Sister Marie.

"I want to ask you where I have been all these three long weeks," said Lady Rydal. "I have been lying here—living, yet I remember nothing, neither the nights, nor the days, nor the pains. Where have I been?"

"That is a very wide question. I cannot answer it, dear Lady Rydal," said Sister Marie.

"Talk to me, my dear. Tell me all about the children, my father—my dear, loving father—what trouble I have brought to him, and my mother, Mrs. Gordon. I feel as though I had

come back from a long journey, and had lost sight of them for a long time."

"Now, you must talk no more," said Sister Marie—"not another word; but you must listen, and I will tell you all about those you love so much."

And as she talked so gently and so kindly, great peace seemed to come over the tired heart, the beautiful blue eyes closed, and a deep natural, refreshing sleep came over Lady Rydal,

"She will live," thought the beautiful woman who watched her anxiously—"she will live. I wonder if Heaven will take my life for hers?"

The squire was more than delighted when he came in the morning and heard the good news.

"I have not said much, but it has been a sore trial for me," he observed. "Now I should not wonder if we do have a little good fortune. I think we have had enough of the other kind."

But the hours of convalescence were long, and very dreary. It was during those hours that Lady Rydal learned to love with all her heart the beautiful, noble woman who nursed her. It was during those hours that she opened her heart to her, and told her all the sweet simple story of her life, and all the sad, sweet story of her love. It was during those hours that Vivian, Countess of Lynn, prayed as she had never done in her life before, and the one prayer that never left her lips, that came from her heart, was this one, "Oh, God, be merciful to me a sinner!"

There would be far less sin, far less wickedness and guilt in the world if every one was compelled to take a share in tending a sick-room. All the vain follies of the world die away there. We see the end of it, and we realize the grand truth that it matters little whether we have been rich or poor, happy or miserable; the only thing is if we have saved our souls!

So she, who had once been the brilliant, beautiful Countess of Lynn, prayed and wept, while time was bringing her punishment and her reward.

CHAPTER LVI.

THERE came an evening sweeter, brighter, and fairer than any we know in this fair land of ours: when the sunlight lingered over the mountains and touched the tip of every hill with gold; when the trees and the flowers were resting in the cool, sweet breeze, and the air was musical with the song of birds. The faint, sweet music of the wind, the distant fall of the water, the vesper hymn of the birds, the rustle of the green leaves, were the only sounds that broke the silence; and Lady Rydal lay calm and still. The fire of the fever was over; she was quite herself, with a quick apprehension of all that was going on around.

She was better that evening, with the faint, dreamy calm that comes to those who have suffered long.

Sister Marie was by her side; she had been reading to her, and the soft, musical voice had comforted and soothed her. Then the slanting sunlight fell on the pillows, and the fair, pale face, with its aureole of golden hair; the book fell from Sister Marie's hands, and they began to talk. Perhaps those slanting sunbeams never fell on fairer women or on faces that differed so greatly. One would have been puzzled to decide which was the fairer—Lady Rydal, so pale, so spiritual, the saddest loveliness—Sister Marie, with her dark, majestic beauty—the one so entirely dependent on the other.

"What a lovely evening it is!" said Sister Marie; and her mind ran quickly over the many fair evenings she had seen in another land. "How proud I shall be, and how happy, when I see you out in the midst of all this sunlight, Lady Rydal," said her nurse.

"And I shall be pleased, too. I feel as though I had been lying in a darkened room for months."

"You have been very ill," said Sister Marie; "but I think when you do get well, you will be stronger than you have been for years."

"Do you? I—well—I was going to say that I did not feel very delighted at hearing that; but it would have been ungrateful. I must thank Heaven, for the children's sake."

The dark eyes turned to her with infinite love in their depths—the dark, beautiful face flushed with emotion. Sister Marie

bent lovingly over the pale, sweet face; she held the two white hands in her own.

"Are you not happy, dear, that you do not wish to live?" she asked.

Tears rose in the blue eyes, and the pale lips trembled.

"No; I am not happy, Sister Marie," replied Lady Rydal. "I have had a strange loss in my life—a loss that has darkened it until it is all shadows."

"You have your children and the squire," said Sister Marie.

"Yes, Heaven bless them! I have them, and I love them," she said, gently; "but, in one way, love of my children only makes my pain greater and harder to bear.

"I have often thought," continued Lady Rydal, "that I should like to tell my story to you. You are—you must not think it flattery, dear—but you are different to most women, at least to the women, my lot has fallen among. In the first dreadful smarts of my pain my mother, Mrs. Gordon—I call her mother, but she is father's second wife—she was my great comfort. If I had not had her near me to talk to, I should have died, my anguish and despair were so great. She was my comfort. Since then I have spoken to no women of my sorrow, and I should like to tell you."

By that time the fair, sad face lay pillowed on Sister Marie's arm, and Sister Marie, bending over it, caressed it with loving fingers. She smoothed the waves of golden hair, so bright and shining, feeling heart pierced with that terrible sword, the name of which is regret.

"You have been so kind to me, Sister Marie, that even if we should never meet again, I must always think of you as the best friend I ever had. I fancy, too, that although you wear this black habit now, you know something of life and its mysteries, something of the grim, gray, old world which holds so many tragedies; and Sister Marie, I think no tragedy so terrible as my own."

"It will ease your heart, dear, to tell me about it," said Sister Marie, gently.

"Yes; I feel to-night, with the sun shining and the birds singing—I feel as though I must speak of it, as though this great weight at my heart would grow less; and I love you so, dear, it will ease my heart to talk to you."

Heaven forgive her if she was doing wrong; it was she who had ruined the happiness of this fair young life; it was she who had caused all this pain and anguish; she who had in-

terrupted and ended for her the tranquil, happy life that could be her's no more. She was not worthy to kneel, by this sweet and innocent woman, to hold her in her arms, to lay the sinless head on her breast, to kiss the pure, sweet face—she, who had robbed her of husband, happiness, and love.

"I am not worthy!" she cried, in the depths of her heart, yet she kissed the sweet face more lovingly—"I am not worthy, but if I can comfort her, Heaven knows that I would give my life to do so."

"You *must* have thought this a strange houshold, Sister Marie—no husband, no father, although the children and I are here—no mention of husband or father, nothing but gloom, and questions in the eyes of the children that can never be answered—nothing else."

"I saw from the first, dear, that there was a mystery, and that you were very unhappy," said Sister Marie, gently; "but I knew, also, that if there was anything you would like to tell me, you would do so in your own good time. But lately, I have not thought you would ever speak to me about that which I could see lies so heavily on your mind."

"And I," said Lady Rydal, "have longed to tell you—have longed to open my heart to you. When Gordon cried always for his papa, and I had no answer for him, I knew you must think it strange—and—mysterious that I should not know where he was, or anything about him."

"I knew," said the sister, quietly, "that your husband had gone away."

The words fell so gently from her lips, so quietly, and ye with such a peculiar ring, that Lady Rydal looked at her with wondering eyes.

"What a loving heart you have, Sister Marie!" she said. "You are all sympathy. I believe you feel my trouble as though it were your own."

Heaven only knew how much more! A shaft of sunlight fell over the black dress and the bowed head, over the pale face and white hands of Lady Rydal, over the golden hair and the white pillow—a sunbeam that made a halo to the fair head, as Lady Rydal said,—

"I will tell you my story. There is nothing uncommon about it, although it has ended in a dark, bitter tragedy; and, Sister Marie, you will tell me what you think. I have never been able to understand.

"You know my father, the squire," continued Lady Rydal: "he has idolized me all his life. I think no father has ever

loved a child so much. I had the happiest childhood, the happiest girlhood in the world. The only drawback was that for some years I did not get on well with my stepmother; but I can see now that it was more my fault than hers. But when my trouble came—my terrible, awful trouble—I had no truer friend than my stepmother. That healed all our difference. I called her mother then, and I have done so ever since. Still—you understand, Sister Marie, I love her dearly, I am most grateful to her, but we differ greatly in character, and I could not talk to her—Heaven bless her!—as I can talk to you.

"You know England well, Sister Marie; I think the prettiest part in it is my father's home, Leeth. Everything about it is so old—the house, the trees—old and beautiful with the beauty of age.

"I do not think I shall see it again," she continued, "but it is before my eyes now—a grand, gray old mansion, half covered with ivy, buried in foliage, with great, deep windows, oaken floors, and a fine old porch. You should see Leeth when the sunbeams fall over it, and the grand old woods are green. The sweet southern seas kiss the ground, for they slope down to the beach, which the spring tides wash. But, oh, sister, the loveliest part, by far, of my dear home, is the lime-trees.

"There are none like them in England—none so tall, so spreading, so beautiful. The leaves, when they are young, have a hue of tender green that is half golden. All the birds in the country flocked to those trees; all the bees preferred them even to the sweetest roses. Ah, Sister Marie, let me tell you again those beautiful words that have haunted me ever since I saw them first so many happy years ago. I thought then, and I think now, they must have been written about the lovely limes that grow at Leeth."

A new light came into Lady Rydal's eyes as she murmured the words to herself,—

"'Tis but the scent of blooming limes,
Blown on some vagrant breeze,
That takes me back to olden times,
And to the old home trees.
Strange that a perfume of a flower
I loved in early years,
Should move me with resistless power,
And dim my eyes with tears.
I peer adown a shadowy track,
Lit up by sunny gleams,

And to my side comes smiling back
The love of bygone dreams.

"Again I saunter to and fro
In the old familiar place,
And watch the sunlight come and go
On a well-beloved face.
I hear the bees hum round the flowers,
And through the fragrant air,
The golden dust floats down in showers,
Upon that golden hair.
Oh, murmuring trees! oh, fragrant breeze!
Oh waving, whispering limes!
Oh, there to be, again with thee,
My love of olden times!"

"Home and the lime-trees were one to me," she said, half sadly; "I have never seen a lime-tree since I left but that my heart has gone straight to my dear old home."

"I played under those lime trees when I was a child, happy and gay of heart. I walked under their shade when the beautiful, vague, sweet dreams of girlhood came to me. I lingered there with my lover.

"Ah, Sister Marie, you have chosen, like Mary in the Scriptures, the better part!"

If she could but have known the bitterness of heart with which Sister Marie listened to those words.

"You do not understand anything about earthly loves and lovers; but oh, my dear—my dear, such a lover came to me—so young, so beautiful, so brave. No girl ever had such a lover; there is but one such man in the world. I wish I could paint him for you as he was when he first came wooing me. I wish I could paint his beautiful, debonair face—his dark blue eyes, and clusters of brown hair, the mouth that had such grand lines and sweet curves.

"Oh, love, my love!" she cried, wringing her hands, "why have you left me?"

And every word she uttered was a dagger in the heart of the hapless Countess of Lynn.

CHAPTER LVII.

"SOME people," continued Lady Rydal, after a moment's pause, "have abundance of happiness, spread over many years; the happiness of twenty lives were compressed into that short time when my lover came wooing me. If I had been miserable for twenty years before and for twenty years after, I should still have had more happiness than falls to the lot of most women.

"Ah, Sister Marie, he was so gay, my young lover, so light of heart, it was like being in the sunshine to be with him.

"I do not know if you have read much English poetry," Lady Rydal said, suddenly, "or if you know the beautiful poems of Tennyson; if so, perhaps you may remember one called 'Ænone,' where Ænone, deserted, laments the loss of her lover, Paris.

"Paris always reminds me of my lost lover, just as I myself am like Ænone; he was so bright and glad of heart. He loved me in those days, I am quite sure of it—loved me with all his heart; I was his first love, and he lavished all his heart on me. Under the limes was to me as the very garden of Paradise; he loved me so dearly, and it seemed to me when I was there with him that the sun shining in the sky, the birds swaying on the boughs, the leaves rippling in the summer wind, the flowers blooming, all knew how happy I was, and how much he loved me. I could not tell you of all his graceful fancies and loving words—of all his caresses.

"What is it, Sister Marie, dear, are you ill?" for a sudden low cry came from the lips of the listening woman, and her head fell forward on her breast.

"Are you ill, dear?" repeated Lady Rydal.

It was with a superhuman effort that she answered,—

"No; my hand is cramped," and she moved it slightly.

Lady Rydal, perfectly satisfied, went on,—

"The old proverb says: 'The course of true love never did run smooth:' our love was true, and it ran smoothly enough. There was never a cloud in our sky, we had not even the traditionary rose leaf, we never had a quarrel, we never had one disagreeable word, we were as happy as happy could be. My

dear old father was delighted with the marriage, for I must tell you who my lover was."

A sweet, sad smile played round her lips as she went on,—

"He was like a lover in a fairy tale, for, besides being young and beautiful, he was rich and a baronet; he lived at a beautiful old place called Dunswold, and, setting aside that I loved him, he was what the world calls an excellent match for me."

"I had no great position; my father was simply a country squire, not even a very wealthy one, and I knew less than nothing of the world. I had never been to London; I knew no great people."

"And," thought Vivian, Countess of Lynn, to herself, as she heard these words, "*that* is the reason why no one knew of his marriage; he married one quite unknown to the world."

"Still," said Lady Rydal, "I have not told you my lover's name; he was Sir Lionel Rydal," and she wondered again at the low cry of pain that came from Sister Marie's lips.

"We were married after *the* happiest wooing the sun ever shone on. Looking back at the time, I see it through a haze of golden sunlight, all beauty and brightness. I went home with my husband to Dunwold, and we were happy beyond words. I could not tell you how happy, because words are too weak to describe what was perfect bliss. How I loved my husband, and how he loved me! the very angels might have envied my happiness. I can look back in my own mind to pictures that are peerless; I can remember days that were as one unbroken dream, and I did not forget to thank Heaven."

"I remember the day when my first-born child, the little Gordon, was placed in my arms. Oh, dear, you are trembling again. Lionel came in to see him. To this moment I see the look on his face—of proud tenderness, of proud happiness—as he gazed at mother and child. I remember, too, when the little Blossom came, so fair and lovely, how he kissed me, and said that no blossom could be so fair as this beautiful flower.

"I remember times when my heart was so full of happiness that I was just a little bit afraid; it seemed too much for one heart—for one life. There was no blessing life held that had not fallen to me—not one. I had the best husband in the world. I wish I could describe how bright and glad he made my life. I had never an angry word from him. I never saw a frown on his face. His rich, cheery voice was always full of gladness. To hear him about the house was enough to make

any one cheerful; always content—always bright. He never found fault. Unlike some men, who delight in showing their authority, he was always gentle—pleased with everything; he was worshipped by his servants. I had two of the sweetest little children any mother has ever loved; my sturdy, brave little Gordon and the fair, tiny Blossom. I had a grand old home; everything that my heart could desire and wish. Could any woman have been happier?"

"I should think few women are ever so happy," replied the sister, gently; "very few."

Lady Rydal went on.

"My husband had business that took him to London during the season. I remember how he urged me to go with him, but I fancied Blossom seemed delicate, and feared that London might not be good for her; so I asked him to wait until the next year, and then we would go together; not that the season was anything to me, but if it pleased him I would have gone anywhere with him.

"Until then—ah, hear me, Sister Marie—until then I am quite sure that my darling never looked into another woman's face, or kissed another; he was as true to me as the stars to heaven; every beat of his heart was my own. There are some marriages that change earth into heaven: mine was one.

"And then he had to leave me—he was to go to London for these few weeks alone. I was grieved to part from him, but glad that he should have some little change. It is well sometimes for a man to leave the shelter of his home and go out into the great, big, struggling world.

"Lionel had been so domesticated I was pleased that he should have the change. As for doubting him—for being afraid that he should give even a thought to any one else—such ideas never occurred to me; I trusted him as I trusted Heaven. He was away from us much longer than I expected, but he wrote to me constantly, and in his letters I saw no shadow of change—he mentioned no woman's name to me.

"He came back to us, sister, loving, kind, and bright, laden with presents for me and for the children. He told me all about London, but he mentioned no woman's name to me. He seemed just the same at first; after a few days I saw some slight change. He was always cheerful and bright with me and with the children: but when I found him alone he looked more thoughtful than usual—there was even a touch of sadness about him. More than once I found him looking at me with a curious expression on his face—facts which did not strike me

then as they do now. Everything had fallen into its usual state again, when one morning a letter came for my husband in the handwriting of a lady.

"I gave it him without a thought that it was my death-warrant, but it certainly was. He told me that same day he had to go to town on business, but that he should not be long gone."

"Did he say that?" asked a half-stifled voice. Lady Rydal was too much absorbed in her story to notice it.

"Yes, he said just that, he should only be away a few hours, and I have never seen him since."

"He went for a few hours?" said the same unnatural voice "you are quite sure?"

"Only a few hours," said Lady Rydal, "he repeated it to me many times, and I have always felt sure when he started, that he had no other thought in his mind."

"No other thought!" said the listener, faintly. "Oh, Heaven, how hard was this to bear, how terribly hard."

"No," continued Lady Rydal. "I have thought it all over a hundred times, and I am sure that when my husband left me that morning he intended returning to me; the mystery will never be explained, I shall never understand it, but I am sure of that as I am of my own life. Did you speak, Sister Marie?"

No, she had not spoken, only a faint inarticulate moan of pain came from her lips.

He had not loved her then after all, and she was darkly guilty in the sight of Heaven.

"I have never seen him since," continued Lady Rydal; "he kissed me when he left me, kindly, lovingly, as he had ever done and he never came back. Never! Oh, sister! think when I loved him so what those words mean to me. Never. My eyes have never rested on his face since; my ears have never drank in the sound of his voice. You know those beautiful words in the Scripture that tell how the thirsty hind longs for the stream of water? oh, sister! so have I longed, thirsted for him.

"You will not understand now why he left me. I must tell you more. I expected him back that same evening; once or twice before at very long intervals he had gone out in the morning on business and had returned in the evening, so that at first I felt not the least uneasiness or alarm.

"He did not return that evening; I waited for him every hour of that day; he never came. No letter, no message, no

tidings whatever. I have wondered since that did I not go mad that day.

"On the following morning came a letter from him. I had not slept all night; my heart and brain were on fire. I did not think of him as faithless; I could sooner have dreamed that Heaven was unjust; but I thought some terrible accident had happened to him.

"Sister Marie, I sat out among the roses when his letter came, and when I saw it a great glad cry came from my lips; my heart was full of gratitude. I can smell the roses now; I can see the shadows of the lime boughs.

"I hastened to open it, feeling sure that I should read a few loving words, telling me why he had been absent, and when he was coming home.

"That moment, the one in which I held the letter unopened in my hands, was the last happy one in my life. I opened it, and read my doom. I have that letter by me now, and will show it to you. It killed me; all that was bright, loving or hopeful died in that hour, for it said—oh, Heaven, how horrible the words are to me!—it said that he had left me forever, and that the beautiful, guilty partner of his flight was Vivian, Countess of Lynn."

CHAPTER LVII.

THERE was profound silence as that name fell. It struck the heart of the listening woman like a sharp knife; her dark, beautiful face drooped over the fair one, but no words came to her lips. She thought once what would happen if Lady Rydal should ever know that she was Vivian, Countess of Lynn; but that was impossible. She had but one longing just at that moment, and it was that she might crawl away and die, for it was all her fault.

"God be merciful to me a sinner!" she cried, in the depth of her heart.

"Vivian, Countess of Lynn!" repeated Lady Rydal. "Ah, Sister Marie, can you think what this was to me, the wife who loved him?"

"I can think," said the sister—"I can imagine it all."

"At first I was stunned; I read that fatal letter over and over again. I could not realize, believe, nor understand.

"At last—at last I knew he had gone from me—the man whom I loved, my lover, my husband lover! He had left me, and had taken some one else in my place; and I, even when I realized it—oh, heart of stone!—I neither went mad nor died.

"The letter gave me no reason; he did not say why he had done it—why he had left me—only that he had gone from me forever, but that he loved me always."

"Did it—did he say that?" the low voice asked again.

Ah, Heaven! how cruel, how faithless he had been to both.

"*Did* he say that?" asked Sister Marie.

"Yes; I can remember the very words—they were written in letters of fire on my brain: 'Oh, Elinore, beautiful, beloved, faithful wife, good-by forever more! I go out into the darkness of death. Good-by!' The letter ended with these words."

Again for a few moments there was silence that was like the pulsation of pain.

"Out into the darkness of death," repeated Sister Marie, with a shudder. "Those are terrible words. And oh! Lady Rydal, do you not see, do you not understand, those are not the words of a successful lover?"

"That is the mystery," said Lady Rydal.

It was well that she could not see the anguish in the beautiful face of the Countess of Lynn.

"I had never heard the name of the Countess of Lynn," continued Lady Rydal. "I knew nothing of her, had never heard any mention of her. My husband had talked to me about many ladies, but he had never mentioned her.

"Vivian, Countess of Lynn! Oh, sister, what had I done that she should take my husband from me? And she—oh, shame, bitter shame that such words should be said!—she had a husband of her own. I cannot tell what happened then until I found myself with my father, more than half mad with sorrow and shame, but quite unable to realize then that he had gone for evermore. And, sister, my children, who would have comforted me, I dare not tell, because little Gordon had his father's eyes. I have often wondered," said Lady Rydal, "if the martyrs, who were placed upon the rack, remembered afterward all they had suffered then. I can remember my pains. I remember—would to Heaven that I could forget!—the long, terrible days, the long, terrible nights—the hours when I longed and prayed for death—the hours when I could not bear the light of the sun, the song of birds, or the odor of flowers—the hours when I longed only to turn my face to the wall and die! I do not know how I lived through them."

" Oh, sister, it was too hard to bear. Why you are crying over me, dear ! "

For Sister Marie had bent her head over the white hands—burning kisses and burning tears fell on them.

" I am so sorry for you," said Sister Marie. " You were so young, and it was very cruel."

" Yes, it was more cruel than death," said Lady Rydal. " It would have been far more merciful, on the morning the left me, if he had plunged a sword in my heart—it would have been much better for me. It was too cruel. All my life was blighted, ruined, lost ; and yet my only fault was that I had loved him too well. Why, Sister Marie, you are crying bitterly for me !"

" I am so sorry for you, dear ; it was so hard. Do you forgive her—this cruel, wicked woman, who took your husband from you ?"

" Forgive *her !*" said Lady Rydal, slowly. " I—I have never thought of that. I have wondered often if I could forgive him ; my heart pleads for him ; but her—the woman who lured my love away, who stole my husband, who robbed my children of their father—forgive her—no ! Let Heaven punish her ?"

" Oh, my dear—my dear, those are terrible words to say !" cried Sister Marie.

" It was a terrible thing to do," replied Lady Rydal—"a terrible thing. It may be that the world laughs at such stories ; but I cannot forget the stern, written law of Heaven. You know, sister, what happened to women who sinned as they sinned ? In the olden days they were stoned to death. I saw a picture once ; I wish Vivian Countess of Lynn, could have seen it. Such a picture ! It was of the Jewish law, of the time when women who sinned as the Countess of Lynn has sinned, were stoned to death. The difference between the olden times and these—then a woman who lost her honor and betrayed her husband, was stoned to death, and died in an agony of pain and shame ; now the world merely laughs, makes a jest of it, and the only thing it ends in is divorce and damages ; but in those days sin was accounted sin, and people gave it its right name. My dear, you are crying still."

" It is only that I am so sorry for you," she said—" so sorry."

" It would have gone hardly with Vivian, Countess of Lynn, if she had lived in those days, sister."

The words tore the very heart of the listening woman ; but

how could she, without revealing herself, defend herself? She had been madly foolishly wicked but not so bad as that. Let the anguish of that interview on the Calais sands prove the truth. But she could not speak in her own defense.

"I shall never forget that picture," said Lady Rydal. "The pity is that all the wives who are inclined to think lightly of honor and purity, cannot have it ever before their eyes. Let me tell you what it was like.

"A great, grand picture, it represented the interior, or rather the outer portion of a Jewish temple—one could see the pillars, and arches, and the doors that led to the interior where was a vast crowd—people of all kinds—women and men, old and young, rich, and poor, and they had all gathered to see this woman die. Strange that the sun shining now over the limes and the roses should have shone on that scene; there were the stern faces of men, and the weeping faces of women, the wondering faces of little children. Ah, sister, fancy a fashionable crowd gathered in Hyde Park to see Vivian Countess of Lynn, stoned to death for the same sin!

"In the midst of the crowd knelt a woman, young, and very fair, she had a face of wondrous beauty, and a mass of dark waving hair. I wondered, as I looked at her, what her history, had been.

"Had she loved one man and married another, then met the one she loved and lost herself? Had she married without love, and afterward met, some one whom she did love, and so gone wrong! Oh, sister, do not cry so! Or, had she fallen into sin lightly, without thought, as perhaps some do?

"She had been brought there to die among those stern men; no friendly face was near her, the husband she had injured was not by her side. They had stripped the beautiful arms and shoulders bare.

"Oh, sister, do not cry so! And they were beginning to stone her. One sharp, cruel stone had struck the white shoulder, and had made a great bleeding wound; another had cut the beautiful hand; a third had bruised the white bosom. She held up her arm to defend herself, and the arm was covered with cruel wounds. There could be no defense. She had grievously sinned, and she had to die—to die! The fine ladies of these days, who feel dishonor a jest, should feel the blows from these stones, sister.

"Stoned to death! She would not live long, for the shower of stones would grow heavier. Perhaps the strong, stern men who threw them grew sorry for her, and would kill her soon

Oh, sister, do you think that of all those who stood round to slay her and to see her die—do you think there was one without sin? And, oh, sister, I wonder—I wonder where is the justice of Heaven? The sin is the same sin; it wants the same punishment, the God who punishes it is the same God. Yet in those days a woman was stoned to death, and in these she is laughed at for being found out, and forgiven. The laws of men may change, but never the laws of God. Let them look to it that break the law which bids husbands and wives be true to each other. I have never forgotten that picture, and in my own mind I have always called the kneeling figure—the woman stoned to death—the beautiful bleeding creature with the bleeding brow and bruised breast, Vivian, Countess of Lynn! No; I have not forgiven her.

"No. If she had taken from me my last farthing—if she had robbed me of my fair name—if she had stamped out whatever beauty God has given me—if she had done me the deadliest injury—I would have forgiven her, I would have taken her even to my heart of hearts. But having stolen from me my husband, let God punish her. No men will throw stones at her; but every tear she has cost me will become a stone in the hands of the angels. Oh, sister, do not cry so!

"I will tell you the rest of the story that was my death. Then my husband left, and went away with Vivian, Countess of Lynn. Since then I have been a heart-crushed woman—the shadow of my former self. The ghost of Elinore Gordon has taken my place. For me all life ended when I lost my love."

CHAPTER LIX.

"You must not think," resumed Lady Rydal, "that I bear actual living malice and hatred in my heart. Perhaps if ever she asked me to pardon her, I might do so; but she never will. I shall never see her in this world; we shall meet before the bar of Heaven in the next.

"I will tell you the rest of my story; you will see that it is sad above all others. When I quite understood and had brought home to my mind the force of the truth, I sent for my father. You can imagine his grief; he had loved Lionel so entirely and had trusted him with his whole heart.

"He came; the lawyer, Mr. Norton, came; but there was nothing to be done; my father heard no word from him; we have heard no word since.

"My husband had acted as he thought most generously to me, he had divided his income between us, he wished me to remain always at Dunwold, until Gordon come of age, so that it was clear enough when he sent these directions he never intended to return."

"They were written before he left England?" asked Sister Marie.

"Yes, they must have been; he wrote to the unhappy lady's husband, Lord Lynn. There was nothing to be done. The lawyer, John Wilson, of Lincoln's Inn, could tell her nothing; he was more astonished than we were: but he knew about Lady Lynn; he said she was very young and very beautiful, that her husband was old and stern; she was half Spanish, half English, and had for two seasons been the queen of beauty and fashion; but he could not tell me why she had lured my husband away: no one knows that.

"I had a long illness then, and I was recovering. Lord Lynn came to see me."

Sister Marie could not repress a start of surprise.

"Lord Lynn!" she cried. But Lady Rydal did not seem to see anything unnatural in her surprise.

"Yes; was it not strange? Do you know, Sister Marie, when I saw him and—and—thought of Sir Lionel, I felt a little sorry for her. He was old and he looked stern, he had an angry face, and I thought how different it was to the face of my husband. I could imagine how he would crush the life and happiness of a bright young girl, such as they pictured Lady Lynn. Still, it was no excuse; he was her husband, and she was bound to him, no matter what he was."

"No," said Sister Marie, gently. "It was no excuse. But why did he come to see you?"

Do as she would, she could not repress the curiosity she felt. What could possibly have taken Lord Lynn to Dunwold?

"He came," said Lady Rydal, "to consult me. I felt sorry for him: there was a dignity and courtesy about him which I admired, and I am sure he had loved his young wife very dearly. He wanted to know what I was going to do; what I had thought of it, and I told him 'Nothing.' He said that after long thought he had come to the same decision."

Sister Marie listened eagerly now. How she had longed to know this.

"Lord Lynn said the greatest punishment that could be awarded to them would be to take no steps. He said also that if we went through all the miseries of the divorce court it would only result in their marriage. Can you imagine anything one-half so horrible?

"If Lord Lynn had applied for a divorce, and I had done the same, the two who had inflicted such pain and anguish upon us could have been married. Lord Lynn said that society was so corrupt that if they returned to England married, the chances were that they would be received into the world again. That seems to me horrible!"

"It is horrible," said Sister Marie, gently.

"Lord Lynn was very kind to me," Lady Rydal continued. "He could not have been kinder; and one thing he said pleased me much—you will think I am a weak, foolish woman. Speaking of his wife, he said: 'She is very beautiful;' he added, 'but she is no fairer than you,' I cannot tell how it was but that comforted me.

"The one thing that puzzled us was this: Some friend told Lord Lynn that he had seen Sir Lionel Rydal at Alexandria, and that he was quite alone. That was a mystery. If he could leave me, the children, home, friends, and all in the world, for her sake, why were they parted? I have never believed it. I think, instead of his being alone, that Sir Lionel kept her from every one's sight. Then, sister, we heard no more. I do not know in what part of the world my husband lives; the only thing I do know is this, that he must be living, or we should have heard of his death, that seems certain."

But Sister Marie was just as puzzled. Why had he not returned? Since they parted on the Calais sands she had heard nothing of him. Where had he gone? What was he doing? She longed to know; she would have risked almost anything to know. But his wife was in the same position. Why had he not returned?

"It seems strange that during all this time you should have heard nothing of him," said Sister Marie; "strange he has never written to ask about you or the children!"

"Do you know," said Lady Rydal gently, "that I often think it is shame which keeps him from writing or sending. He must be terribly ashamed when he thinks of us; for naturally he was most honorable—the very soul of honor."

"Perhaps he was terribly tempted," said Sister Marie.

"That may have been: but why should men and women differ so? No man could have tempted me. I need not tell

you how impossible it was for me to live at Dunwold after that. The place was haunted for me. I saw my husband in every room; I started up constantly, thinking I heard his voice, thinking he called me; nor could I hear the kindly expressed sympathy of my friends and neighbors. Let a deserted wife be innocent as she may, let her put the best and bravest face to the world, let her be pure as an angel, guiltless, free from all blame, perhaps the victim of a bad, wicked man, and she is still looked upon with suspicion and distrust: she is still the object of unkind remark and ridicule; that is what experience has taught me."

"It is a cruel lesson," said Sister Marie.

"It is a hard one to bear," replied Lady Rydal; "but I am quite sure of one thing—it is strange to say, but I am quite sure of it—the world in these cases always takes the part of men. I cannot imagine how it is; one would think that the weakest would be protected and defended."

"Hardly," said Sister Marie; "that is not the way of the world. The weakest, as a rule, find fewest friends."

"I have not much more to tell you, Sister Marie! When I found I could not live at Dunwold, I asked papa to find me a home somewhere far away, where nothing could remind me of the past. Fortunately we heard of this villa, and came here."

"But you cannot remain here always, Lady Rydal. As the children grow you must give them an English education, especially your son."

"Yes, that is what puzzles me. I have thought sometimes of trusting my children with my father and mother, but I could not bear the separation from them. You see, life has nothing left for me."

"Yes, it has—your children. No one could take your place with them."

"Before my illness," resumed Lady Rydal, "I was always thinking what I could do about Gordon. You see how intense the child's desire is to see his father. Sending for him seemed like an overture on my part—one that I could not and would not make: yet, to let his only son die longing for him, yet not seeing him, would be wrong, I am sure. So, after long thinking, I wrote and told him that Gordon was dangerously ill, and longed to see him. I wrote that letter on the very day I was taken ill. It went, I suppose."

"It would be sure to go," said Sister Marie, not daring to add that, seeing it on the table, she had sent it herself.

"And there has been no answer?" said Lady Rydal wistfully.

"None that I have heard of, and I think the squire would have told me if anything so important had happened," was the answer.

"What do you think yourself, Sister Marie? do you think he has received the letter?"

"I cannot possibly tell," was the guarded reply.

"Tell me another thing," said Lady Rydal; "from all that I have told you, do you think if he received it he will come?"

"I think he will," replied Sister Marie. "You say he loved the child most dearly; you say that you believe shame for his own conduct keeps him away. I see no reason why he should not come."

"It's three weeks since I wrote—nay, more," said Lady Rydal.

"True; but perhaps the letter may follow him half round the world. From what you have told me of him, I feel quite sure that he will come."

And when Lady Rydal heard those words she was silent for some minutes. She had great faith in the judgment of Sister Marie, and it seemed to her that this decision was final.

"There is one thing," said Sister Marie. "It is certain he will come! According to your description of him, Lady Rydal, your husband cannot be a bad man. It is quite possible that sudden temptation assailed him—that reckless passion took possession of him, You will, perhaps, know in the future; but he cannot be a wicked or a heartless man. It is not likely that he should leave such an appeal unanswered."

"He loved Gordon," said Lady Rydal, thoughtfully. "I am sure he will be greatly distressed over him. I remember when he was quite a baby he had an illness, some simple childish malady, but Sir Lionel never slept until he was well; he could not bear to leave him. I think of the two he was more anxious than I was. He cannot have forgotten the boy. Sister Marie," she added, suddenly, "there is one thing makes me afraid."

"What is it, dear?"

"My father. He was so passionately angry, so indignant, so thoroughly aroused, that I am afraid if he ever sees Lionel again there will be murder. am certain that if, in the earlier days of our sorrow, my husband had crossed my father's path, he would have slain him."

"The squire will be more reasonable now: time softens anger. He will think what is best for you first."

"What do you think is best for me, Sister Marie?" asked Lady Rydal.

"The best thing for you, my dear," said the sister, gently, 'would be for your husband to return to you—to implore your pardon—for you to forgive him, and go home with him."

But Lady Rydal shook her head. Who could give her back the happiness of old?

CHAPTER LX.

A BEAUTIFUL dreamless sleep had come to Lady Rydal: gradually the blue eyes had closed, the fair face relaxed, and the slumber that was full of life-giving strength and health, fell upon her. Then Sister Marie went to rest. Lady Rydal had relieved her heart of its long, heavy, sorrowful burden; some one else shared it now; it had comforted her more than words can tell to trust in another woman, to hear expressions of loving sympathy from a woman's lips, and for the first time almost since her trouble came, she slept without dreams. The other sister took Sister Marie's place, and as she looked into the dark, beautiful face, so white and worn now, she said,——

"If you do not take care, Sister Marie, you will have the fever yourself. How long is it since you have slept?—this makes the third night."

"But Lady Rydal is better; we shall not have much more sitting up. She is better, and she would not have made such good progress without incessant care."

"You have come to the end of your strength, Sister Marie," said the sister, Eulalie by name; "and," she added, laughing, "if you do not promise to take care of yourself, I shall write to the convent and ask them to send for you. If you could see your own face at this moment, you would be frightened at yourself."

"I am glad I cannot see it," said Sister Marie half sadly.

That was the same face men and women had crowded to see, the brilliancy of which had been on the lips of all men: the face that had won, and lost, a coronet. She was glad enough to get into her own room, and to think of all she had

heard. It did occur to her to wonder, why she had been so heavily punished; other people had done worse than she had done, yet they had been happier.

She had been sent to rest, but no rest came to her. It seemed to the hopeless lady that she had never realized her full position till now. These words rang in her ears:—

"Beautiful, beloved wife, I go—good-by!—I go out into the darkness of death."

"The darkness of death," that was what he had thought of the life he was to spend with her. There was no hope in it, no brightness; it was the darkness of death. Then she saw that if she had not tempted him he would never have gone. It was her mad passion for him, her criminal yielding to a reckless infatuation, and not his love for her. In that moment she doubted if he had ever loved her, and she had given her life in vain.

How those unconscious words of Lady Rydal had lashed and stung her! how these had pierced her heart:—

"The guilty woman with the bleeding brow and bruised breast always reminds me of Vivian, Countess of Lynn." She had heard these charges brought against herself: she had heard herself accused of a crime she had not committed, and she had not dared to defend herself. If Lady Rydal knew the whole truth she would be more merciful in her judgment; but she did not. She believed that Lady Lynn had been with her husband ever since they left England. She could not possibly know that, having found Sir Lionel had wife and children, she had refused to go with him—she had drawn back even at the eleventh hour.

Would Lady Rydal ever know the truth, and, if she did, would it plead for her? And she wondered more and more at the strength of the words uttered by the gentle lady. Who would have believed there was such strength, such energy, such passion in that refined, delicate, dainty lady? She dared to call a sin a sin; she dared to give it its right name.

"And this," said Vivian, Countess of Lynn, to herself, "this is the end of all my beauty and hopes—the fatal, shameful end."

Even as she said the words, she knew that it was the price of her own folly, the result of her own sin. There was no sleep for her that night, tired though she was. Over and over again the words of Lady Rydal rang through heart and brain. She could see the picture so vividly described; she could see the

kneeling woman and the stern men, and she longed to tell that she was not so guilty—not so far.

There was but one prayer for her, and it was that God who saw her sin and alone knew its extent, would pardon her, a most miserable sinner. It was part of her religious belief that besides true repentance for sin, there must be suffering and atonement. She had done her best; but there was more to do. She had parted husband and wife, father and children; she must try to bring them together again. She had lighted the flame of hatred in the gentle innocent heart of that injured wife; she must do her best to win her pardon, and then she must go. But he might come and find her there! That must never be. No need to go yet. She felt sure the letter would be long in reaching him, but she must go before he came. They two must never meet—never stand face to face again.

"Was ever a life lost for so little?" asked Vivian, Countess of Lynn, as she thought over these things. "I have not even the poor satisfaction of knowing that he loved me; he never did! Never was so much sacrificed, and so entirely in vain," she said.

There was nothing for it now but to make the best of it—to atone in every way. She had nursed his wife and children. By her skill and devotion, there could be no earthly doubt, she had saved their lives; the next thing was to make their lives as happy as she could. Should she write to him—tell him how he was loved at home in spite of all—tell him how the child pined for him; how his wife's heart ached for him with love and sorrow; how, under the guise of a sister, she had tended them, lived with them, and learned to love them? Should she ask him to come back to them, as she had left them now, and he was sorely needed? Should she plead with him by her own misery—by her own lost and blighted life—to come back to those who loved him?

It was one thing to write a madly romantic letter by the light of the moon, and threaten death if the wild prayer be not granted, and it is quite a different matter to realize what misery, what sin, what despair could arise from the writing of such a letter. She must do her best, and the next step on the road to atonement was to talk to Lady Rydal.

Sister Marie looked very ill in the morning, so ill that Sister Eulalie shook her head gravely.

"You have not slept," she said; "you were too tired even to sleep."

But there was peace almost divine on the beautiful pale face, a light almost divine in the dark eyes, as she answered,—

"I did not sleep, but I have rested, and I feel stronger."

Then she went to Lady Rydal. It was a bright, beautiful morning, with the shine of sun, the song of birds, and the bloom of a thousand flowers.

"I must get well," said Lady Rydal, as she greeted Sister Marie with a kindly smile. "I believe the sun is shining, and I am sure the birds are singing on purpose for me. I am better this morning, and, Sister Marie, I want to talk to you."

"And I," said the sister, with a smile on her face—"I want to talk to you."

So when the sun had risen higher in the heavens, and the air was laden with the perfume of oranges and lemon, and of "every sweet flower the south loves," Sister Marie took her place by Lady Rydal's side. She had done her best to hide every sign of emotion; she tried to think only of her duty as she clasped the white hands in her own.

"How loosely your wedding-ring hangs, my dear," she said. "You must let me fasten it for you or you will lose it."

She found some fine silk and wrapped it round the ring, and, as she was doing it, it struck her as being a strange allegory—one of the strangest that she should make secure this outward symbol of the union of husband and wife.

"I dropped it once," said Lady Rydal. "I grew so thin in the illness I had when Sir Lionel went away. Sister Marie, you cannot tell what a relief it is to me to be able to speak freely and say what I like. I was telling you that my hand grew so thin the ring dropped from my finger. Mrs Gordon picked it up. I have heard that it is such an unlucky thing to drop a wedding-ring. Do you believe it?"

"No," replied Sister Marie. "I do not believe in luck. Perhaps," she continued sadly, "if I had believed in fate, it might have better for me;' and she thought, as she spoke, of the ball and the evil omen—that if she had been more superstitious she would have kept away.

Lady Rydal looked at her.

"I hope fate or luck has been kind to you, Sister Marie," she said gently. "I know it is not etiquette to speak to sisters of their lives or stories, but I hope yours has been a happy fate."

"No," replied Sister Marie; "we who dedicate our lives to charity are not supposed ever to speak of the time we lived

and moved in the world. But I may tell you that no woman, be she who she may, has ever had so cruel a fate—so cruel a life."

"You cannot be more unhappy, or have greater cause for unhappiness than I have, Sister Marie," cried Lady Rydal.

"If we can measure unhappiness, then am I ten thousand times more unhappy than you, dear," said the sister. "I have had a great trouble in my life—far greater than yours. I try to forget it in hard work, but I do not always succeed. It was not for myself, though, that I wished to speak; Lady Rydal, it is of yourself. I must preface what I have to say by telling you that we sisters have a certain spiritual work to do. It is not sufficient that we do our best to bring back health and strength to the poor suffering body, but we are asked to do our best for the souls of those we serve. I want to talk to you; you have placed your full confidence, your full trust in me; now let me help you. I see that you are perplexed and anxious; let me put one question straight before you, and let me help you to answer it'

"What is the question?" asked Lady Rydal.

"It is a grave one for you, and one that must soon occupy all your attention. Tell me—if your husband, Sir Lionel, returns, shall you forgive him?"

There was a dead silence for a few minutes; Lady Rydal's fair face flushed burning red. The very directness of the question startled her; yet she saw that after writing that letter, she must make up her mind.

"Sir Lionel may come at any moment—forgive me if I persist," said the sister. "You can never tell the day, the hour, the minute, on which we may arrive. Let me help you with your decision before he comes. Do not let him find you uncertain; either be ready to forgive him, or do not see him."

"He may not ask me to forgive him," said Lady Rydal. "Although he was so bright and blithe, so gay and glad of heart, he was a proud man. Knowing that he has injured me, he may not ask my forgiveness; he may not wish to return to me."

"I feel sure that he does," cried Sister Marie. "Do not judge him too hardly. You do not know his part of the story. You cannot tell how he was tempted!"

But Lady Rydal held up the hand on which the wedding-ring hung so loosely.

"Hush, dear," she said; "you do not understand; that is the one sin for which, to my thinking, there is no excuse!"

CHAPTER LXI.

The light seemed to deepen on Sister Marie's face as she said gently,—

"There I think you are wrong, Lady Rydal; there is no sin so great but that Heaven forgives it. Do not be too hard, dear, you cannot tell what he may have suffered."

"I have never thought myself hard," said Lady Rydal.

"That would be hard, if your husband came to you, full of sorrow and contrition for his fault, and you refuse to forgive him. 'To err is human, to forgive, divine.'"

"But mine is such a great wrong, Sister Marie, so heavy and deep; besides, as yet there has been no sign that my husband repents. He has never written to say that he was sorry——"

"Perhaps," interrupted Sister Marie; "it may be as you said, that he is ashamed; that he thinks you can never pardon him. It may be that motive, and not indifference, that keeps him from writing."

The fair face softened a little.

"Do you think that probable?" she asked.

"Yes, most probable. I am inclined to think that a few kind words from you would bring him to your feet at once. I think so; then it is for you to decide. Now, we will suppose that he receives your letter, and that, with a heart full of love for his little child, and sorrow for his offence against you, he flies to you—what then?"

"I do not know," said Lady Rydal. "I have never, even to my own heart, been able to answer that question, although it has been always before me. I do not known how to answer it. Neither my conscience, my reason, or my heart speak plainly."

"What does your conscience say?" asked the sister, gently.

"It says that he has sinned so greatly against me, that he has no claim on my compassion or mercy."

"What does your reason say?" asked Sister Marie.

"My reason says that he had left me without cause therefore, when he would return, I can, in my turn, refuse to receive him. Reason says he left me without cause, let him take the consequences of it."

"And your heart," said Sister Marie; "what does that say?"

Lady Rydal's whole face brightened, and the love-light that filled her eyes long ago shone in them once again.

"My heart!—ah, that is a weak counsellor. My heart says 'Forgive him—take him back, with kisses and tears.'"

"Then listen to the voice of your heart," said Sister Marie, "it speaks more truthfully this time than reason or conscience. Listen to it."

"If you were in my place, if by any possibility you could put yourself in my place Sister Marie, could you forgive him and take him?"

"Could I, dear? Heaven knows, yes, I—I have forgiven a greater wrong in my life than this. You see, Lady Rydal, you have others to think of. If you were alone in the world, with only the squire, you might, perhaps, think more of pleasing yourself; but you have the children to think about. You are so good to let me speak to you in this fashion—so good to listen—I will tell you all that is in my mind. You will not be angry?"

"How could I? You are the best friend I have ever had in my life. Say what you will."

"I see two ways before you, then, Lady Rydal, and the choice of them rests entirely with yourself. The first is, that you yield to your natural feelings of vengeance and righteous anger—that you refuse to forgive him, or to be reconciled to him. Your children will grow up without the care and protection of a father——"

"They are doing that now," interrupted Lady Rydal.

"They are quite children now, but as they grow older they will need his care and protection far more than they do now. You must give your boy an English education; and unless you return to England with him, think what long years you will be parted from him.

"Then think of your return to England without your husband—of all the disagreeable things you will have to encounter—of all the horrible reaping up of the old story—of all the cruel reopening of the old wounds! Think of the additional pain to yourself when you reflect that you might have forgiven him, and you refused to do so."

She paused for one moment, while an earnest prayer went from her heart to Heaven that force and eloquence might come to her words, thereby helping her to atone for her wrong by winning Sir Lionel's pardon from Sir Lionel's wife.

"You have a tender and delicate conscience," she said. "There is another view to take of it. Suppose that you refuse to forgive Sir Lionel; you stand upon your rights, and you refuse to take him back. Has it struck you that he may go from bad to worse?"

"No, it has not," was the candid reply.

"Is it worth thinking about? If he returns to you repentant, his heart full of sorrow and good resolutions, and you decline to forgive him, the chances are that he will do worse than he has ever done yet—much worse. You would never forgive yourself if any cold words of yours did him deadly harm."

"That I never should," said Lady Rydal—"never!"

"You see, then, by a refusal to pardon him, there is nothing gained, except the mere gratification of revenge for an injury inflicted; that you punish yourself, your children, your husband, and gratify merely your own feeling against him. Now, let us take the other side. You forgive him; you make a grand, almost superhuman, effort, and you forgive him—all the good resolutions are confirmed in his heart; he is all gratitude to you, because he knows how much you have to forgive; he is all devotion to you, because he has to make up to you for much unhappiness and for many tears; he gives his life to you to atone for his folly. You will have then the happiness that is greatest in this world, that of helping a sinner to repentance: that of helping a man who has fallen into error to atone for it: you will restore their father to your children, and he will be doubly devoted to them. They need never know then of this sad episode in your lives: they will remember nothing more than that papa was away for a long time. You could go back with him to the old home at Dunwold, where this story would soon die away and be forgotten. In time you would be happy again. Oh, Lady Rydal, I plead strongly, for I feel strongly! I feel that your happiness, and the happiness of all those belonging to you, depend entirely on your forgiveness of the wrong done to you."

"That is—if he asks for it," said Lady Rydal.

"He is sure to do *that*," was the answer.

"But, sister, you are forgetting her entirely!" said Lady Rydal.

"Forgetting whom, dear?" asked Sister Marie, looking up.

"Vivian, Countess of Lynn, the woman for whom my husband forsook me and my children: the woman who stands

now in my place. You are forgetting her," and she wondered why that crimson flush dyed the sister's face.

"It seems to me," continued Lady Rydal, "that the—this Lady Lynn—holds the key of the position; she is the one most to be considered. Did I tell you that her husband, old Lord Lynn, is dead, and now she is free? I do not doubt in the least that if Sir Lionel could gain his freedom from me—his release—he would marry her. You forget all the probabilities of that."

"I do not believe it," said Sister Marie. And she longed with her whole heart to tell her why.

"Still you must own there is a probable chance of its truth. If he had grown tired of her—if his heart had come back to me—do you not think he would have written to me? I am afraid that his silence shows that he loves her still, and has forgotten me."

"All that is imagination," said Sister Marie; "we have to deal with this fact—if your husband comes to ask your pardon, shall you forgive him?"

"But, sister, what of her?"

"Never mind her; leave her out of the question," answered Sister Marie; "it lies between you and him.

"She is the question, the very gist of the question. Suppose—all things are possible, you know—suppose that I forgive him, and we should meet her? Ah, no! I cannot tell what what to do until I know something of her. If he has left her—if I thought he would never see her or speak to her again—it would be easier. As it is, she is the stumbling-block—no one, nothing else."

Sister Marie was silent for a few minutes, then she said:

"I have an impression of my own about the matter, Lady Rydal. I do not believe that unhappy lady is with your husband. I feel a sure and certain conviction she is not."

A sudden light, as of hope, came into Lady Rydal's face.

"What makes you think so?" she asks, eagerly. "Oh! if I could believe *that*, if I dare hope that, I should be almost happy—I should indeed. It is the thought of her being with him that tortures me so. Every morning when I wake, that is my first thought, whether she is out with him on the dewy grass; whether she is sitting opposite to him at the breakfast-table; whether he is caring for her as he cared for me. Though it is so long since he went away, I am sure my thoughts have never been an hour away from them. All day long I follow them; I wonder if they are out driving, riding,

walking; I wonder if he talks to her as he did to me; I wonder if his laugh is as hearty, his voice as musical. My torture has been to know that she was with him. Do you remember that poem I read yesterday—'Only a woman?' That taught me that my thoughts were all jealous ones. If he came back to me and uttered her name in his dreams, I should die again. Do you remember the lines?

"'Only, oh, God! to cry for bread,
And to get a stone. Daily to lay my head,
Upon a bosom where the old love's dead.

"'He'll keep that other woman from my sight;
I know not if her face be foul or bright.
I only know that it is his delight.

"'And so my silent moan begins and ends;
No world's laugh, no world's taunt, no pity of friends,
Or sneer of foes with this my torment blends.

"'But haply, as the solemn years go by,
He will think, sometimes with a rightful sigh,
The other woman was less fair than I.'

"Those verses struck me so—they seemed to be written for me; and when I read them I knew that—great as was my love for my husband, great as is my anguish at his loss—greater still is my jealousy of Vivian, Countess of Lynn."

"I do not think he loved her," said Sister Marie. "You promised to show me the letter he wrote to you. I judge, from what you have told me, if he had loved her, he would not have written those despairing words. 'I am going out into the very darkness of death.' Men do not write in that strain when they are going away with the woman they love."

"But, if he did not love her, why did he take her away? Why did he leave me? Anything seems easier to believe than that he did not love her."

"I will tell you a story of two people whom I knew once in the world, and you will see that it is not possible or easy to judge," said Sister Marie.

CHAPTER LXII.

THE STORY OF AN UNLOVED WIFE.

"I HAVE known this story some years," said Sister Marie, "and I have often thought of it since I have been with you. I know the people to whom it happened. I will tell it to you, for it may comfort you. It shows there are many sides to every question—many views of every case—that appearances are often quite deceitful, and that we should pause before we judge."

"But, sister," interrupted Lady Rydal, "this was not the case with me. I did not judge. My husband wrote and told me it was no question of appearances; he actually did it."

"You will hear," said Sister Marie, gently. "I knew these people well. I will tell you of her first, for she was really most to be pitied. She had never known any love, and she had, perhaps, the most passionately loving heart in the whole wide world; she had no father, no mother, brother, or sister; she was adopted by a gallant and noble gentleman, whose wife was jealous of and detested her; she did not know the meaning of the word happiness, and the only one in the world who did love her—the kindly hearted man who adopted her—died, and she was left to the tender mercies of his wife—the woman who hated her.

"She was a beautiful, loving, wilful, passionate girl; she would have made a grand and noble woman under other circumstances. As it was, her training, her life, and everything else was against her.

"She was beautiful enough to the world—said to reign over the hearts of men; she was full of brilliancy, vivacity, and animation. Poor child! poor child'!—not one of the gifts that the good God had lavished upon her brought her happiness.

"I sketch her portrait in weak words; but can you fancy her Lady Rydal, young, beautiful, and loving, with no one creature in the world to love, no one who really loved her—longing, as women of colder nature can never long, for love, happiness, brightness—the passionate heart eating itself away, the restless longing never satisfied? Ah, me! those who have parents, brothers, sisters, friends, can never imagine what a life like hers is."

"Then came an ancient wooer, a rich old man, with broad

lands and enormous wealth, with a coronet for the brow men found so fair, with grand castles and fair domains, with jewels and everything that could tempt a girl. At first she laughed the idea to scorn. Why should she, with her youth, her beauty, her warm, loving heart, marry this old man with nothing but money—why should she ?

"The woman who hated her persuaded her. She was young and easily influenced ; proud enough in many ways, but easily led by a few kind words. She was too young to understand much of the mysteries of life—too young to realize the fact that no one can live without love—too young to know the value of love and its influence. The woman who hated her was for a short time kind and caressing to her ; the old man who wanted to purchase her youth and beauty loaded her with presents, and she consented to be married, with less thought and consideration than she would have given to a new dress.

"Married without a particle of love for her husband, without the least idea of the duties of a wife ; married with the vague longings of a passionate heart all ungratified—she had better a thousand times been buried ; then at least would she have been at rest with God. Do you see the girl, Lady Rydal ? Can you picture her ?"

"Yes, poor child ; I can see her. Tell me what she was like, Sister Marie."

"Men said beautiful as a dream. I can hardly tell. She was tall and shapely. She had the erect, proud, willowy grace of a young palmtree ; she had the proud bearing and carriage of a young queen. When I knew her she was light of heart, and her dark eyes were all fire ; when I knew her her face had a dainty, delicate color, men spoke truly when they said she was beautiful as a dream. Poor child, it was all useless !

"The old man who had purchased her, just as much as though he had gone to the slave market at Constantinople, took her to London, where she was at once welcomed with open arms—where she became the rage. Homage, flattery, and adulation enough were offered to her to have turned a much wiser head than hers.

"I know what her life was like just then. There was no real happiness—no content in it ; nothing but excitement and brilliant gayety. There was no domestic happiness, no love. Her husband wanted all men to admire her and to envy him.

"He was not dull, but he was stern by nature, and did not understand loving. She was all love. If she had been happily married—if she had had a loving husband and little

children—it would have been so different with her. Her life was all excitement. The moment she entered the ballroom, she became the queen and the belle. I have heard that people went to the opera purposely to see her, and were content if they caught among the crowd a glimpse of her face.

"I know, who knew her well, that in all the brilliant life there was no peace, no happiness; it was brilliant gayety, restless longing, and unsatisfied affection. She who was so brilliant before others—she who was the queen of the most exclusive circles in London—she who wore the finest diamonds, whose word was law, whose face was as a star in that world of fashion—spent her nights very often in tears. No matter what a woman may be, she finds it hard to live without love, and without even a semblance of domestic happiness. She must either be very good or very bad without these, for her heart is empty. I know what she must have suffered with her loving heart. Once her husband quite unexpectedly brought her home a present of some fine diamonds, and, poor child! having nothing better than diamonds to love, she flung her arms round his neck and kissed him for them.

"Do you know, Lady Rydal, he was angry with her? That was the only time she ever kissed her husband."

"How dreadful!" said Lady Rydal, so earnestly that Sister Marie smiled.

"It was hard for one so young and loving," she said. "I have often thought, Lady Rydal, since I have known you, that she, my poor young friend, would have been like you, but she had no choice in life—none. In the second year of what I may really call her reign, the one great event of her life happened. She went to a ball given at one of the best houses in London, and there she met her fate; there she met a very handsome, distinguished-looking man. At first it was merely the beauty of his face that attracted her. She asked for an introduction to him, and then——

"I need not dwell on the details, Lady Rydal; they are so sad that I think the very angels might weep over them. This lonely, loving girl, with the lonely, passionate heart, learned to love him with such a love—all the pent-up passion of loveless years was in it, all the longing for love that had been eating her heart away for years, was in it.

"And, remember, Lady Rydal, she did not know it was love; it was something more beautiful, more divine than she had ever known in her life before—something quite new and irresistible. She did not know it was love; she found the

world all change, life was quite different. Her whole heart, and thoughts, and interest were wrapped in him—he was the whole world to her. Of him I must speak with reserve, for I do not know his history as I know hers. He admired her, liked her, was flattered by the preference she evinced for him at all times and in all places: but," added Sister Marie, sadly. "I do not think he ever loved her.

"He may have been led away by passion, he may have been lured by her; but now that I know all the circumstances of the case, I am sure he never really loved her. I cannot tell how it was they met so often, but no day passed without their meeting, until, child, her very life became wrapped in his.

"Heaven alone can judge her! I am sure of one thing from my own knowledge of her, that she did not wilfully go wrong. I am sure not! The path that leads to ruin is broad and sown with flowers; she saw the flowers, but did not see the thorns. They found out at last what had happened, and then his conscience was awakened; he told her they stood on the brink of a precipice. Even then I do not think he loved her, I am sure he did not; it was all her blind, mad love for him. They parted, he left town, and she, with a broken heart, tried to live without him."

"How sad," cried Lady Rydal. "Oh, sister! it seems to me love works more harm than it brings happiness. Why is it so?"

"If love brought nothing but happiness earth would be like heaven," said Sister Marie.

"A short time passed, and the unhappy girl found life unendurable without him. In some way or other the old husband had his suspicions roused, and they quarrelled about him; then she left home—left home and wrote to him, begging him to come to her at once. If he did not come at a certain time she swore that she would kill herself, and he, knowing that he had taught her to love him, knowing that he had wronged her, went to her.

"Once with her he did not leave her again. It must have been a struggle in his heart, but she loved him so dearly, the very force of her passion carried him away. He could not help himself, and, indeed, it is Heaven help any man when a beautiful, impulsive, impassioned woman flings herself in his way.

"They arranged to go away together, to leave the country, some, friends, above all, to give up heaven itself and live for

each other ; they arranged to go far away and live where nothing should remind them of the past.

" But even then," said Sister Marie—" even then, when his arms were round her, and he kissed her face, he did not love her, I am quite sure of it. She saw nothing amiss ; it was love against the world for her. She thought nothing of all she was leaving, she thought only of him ; she was happy for a few hours, only for a few hours. Lady Rydal, think of that—her whole life paid the price of those few hours. When I think of it I cannot help weeping for her." Tears fell from the dark, beautiful eyes.

" Poor child," said Lady Rydal, " it was very sad, but all sin is sad."

" All love is sad, except the love of Heaven," said Sister Marie.

" Ah, no, not all love," cried Lady Rydal. " I think the love of women for men is all sad ; but look at the love of mothers for children ; I see no sadness in that. But why was she happy only these few hours, sister, tell me ? "

CHAPTER LXII.

" The two of whom I was speaking," continued Sister Marie, " were going away, to bright unknown lands, where she thought, poor girl, no sting of conscience, no regret, no remorse, would ever reach her.

" They started on a moonlight night. Yes, she had a few happy hours—very few. They went by steamer, and she sat with him on the deck, poor hopeless child. Do not lose patience with me, Lady Rydal, if I weep. I cannot help it when I think of her. A life paid for a few happy hours. She was talking to him as she watched the moonlight on the waters ; and suddenly, quite suddenly, finding him silent and grave, she asked him of what he was thinking and he, without thought, answered, ' My wife and children.'

" The moon shone on the waves and kissed the boat as they floated by ; the wind stirred the waters. She for a few minutes gave no sign ; the words had broken her heart.

" ' Your what ? ' she said to him at last, a wild hope that

she could not possibly have understood him stirring in her heart.

"'My wife and children,' he repeated, and then, Lady Rydal, she was like a woman turned to stone, for she had never thought, never dreamed that he was married. The wonder was that she did not die; she was so overwhelmed with horror, so startled."

"But it seems very strange," interrupted Lady Rydal. "She must have known it. Every one knows when a man is married,"

"She did not," said Sister Marie, "as you will hear. She never suspected it for one minute. I should tell you that this man was alone in town, that neither wife nor children were with him; another reason was that he had married some one quite unknown to the great world of fashion."

"It was very wicked of him to hide the fact," said Lady Rydal.

"He had not purposely hidden it," replied Sister Marie. "In a brilliant London crowd one speaks but little of one's private concern—very little."

"But why did he not tell the girl?" said Lady Rydal. "There could be no possible reason why he did not tell her."

"It would seem so, and the reason he gave was a very weak one. He did not want to distress her, and it would destroy the whole of the romance. I know that when he left her he had not intended to return; he would never have gone back but for her mad letter; and when he met her he was carried away by a whirlwind of passion, and forgot his wife and children. The proof that the girl had never dreamed of the possibility of his marriage was what followed."

"It seemed to me," said Lady Rydal, "that he was the most to blame. It was a cowardly thing to hide the truth."

"People are drawn into things without foreseeing the end," said Sister Marie. "He was a brave man, and this act of cowardice was, perhaps, the only one of his life. He paid dearly enough for it, I think; for when the steamer touched the port, she told him they must part—they must never meet again.

"And I know, Lady Rydal, the very words in which she said it. Her one great horrible pain was to find that he had loved another. She had believed that he had loved her alone in the wide world. She went mad at first with her great misery. The wonder was that she did not fling herself into the

sea. He said to her. 'Do not cry so desperately. I feel as though I had murdered you.'

"'You have done worse!' she cried. 'You have been most horribly cruel to me. I loved you, but I would not have taken another woman's husband from her—I would not indeed. I would never take from little, helpless children the father who should love and protect them. I am not wicked enough for that.'

"'I loved him in truth,' she said, 'my ideal, the only man who has ever touched my heart: but I should never have loved you, never have cared for you, if I had known that you were the husband of another woman and the father of little children.' Do you feel sorry for her, Lady Rydal? You see she had given her whole life for this."

"I am very sorry for her," said the gentle lady, "more sorry than I can tell you. Poor child."

"I like to hear those kindly lips of yours call her, 'poor child,'" said Sister Marie; "many people judged her harshly. The end of her story was that they parted. I cannot tell you whether he was most relieved or most angry. She was quite firm. He implored and prayed; he said they had gone so far, it was nonsense to recede; he said that she could never return to her husband, he could never go back. But she was quite firm; she would not hear a word, and she left him there. You see, Lady Rydal, as the girl expressed herself, she was wicked enough to leave her own husband, but she was not base enough to wile away the husband of another woman, the father of little children."

"She must have been a noble woman, after all," said Lady Rydal, "she must indeed."

"Yes; long afterward I learned that she had never returned to her husband—that the whole world imagined her to be with her lover; and what would seem stranger to you, her lover never returned. Wherever she went, or wherever he went, those two are wandering still about the world, and people believe them to be together."

"It is a strange story," said Lady Rydal, thoughtfully.

"Yes, and it is perfectly true. I think the waste of that girl's life the most pitiful story I ever heard."

"It is," said Lady Rydal. "She had done nothing worse than run away. Why did she not go back to her husband?"

"It was hardly natural that she should. She never loved him, and she had given her whole heart to this man. It was not likely that she should.

"She drifted away, and who shall say where? I know that she never returned to her husband or the gay world again."

"She may be dead," said Lady Rydal, sadly.

"Best for her," replied Sister Marie; "death would be easier than life for her."

"What became of him?" asked Lady Rydal, after a pause.

"I do not know. I never heard only this much, that he never dared return home. He feared, perhaps, that his wife could never forgive."

"But," said Lady Rydal, "it seems to me that although he was weak and foolish, it was more this girl's fault than his, Sister Marie."

"I have always felt sure of it—quite sure she loved him; but I cannot see that he loved her. Two lives blighted and wasted. Lady Rydal, tell me what you think? If you had been that man's wife would you have forgiven him? Think how he was gradually led into it—of the temptation to his love and his vanity, when the most beautiful and fashionable woman in London fell in love with him. You see he did save himself when he went away from her; but she sent for him, and she asked him to go with her. Who can measure the force of such a temptation? Should you if you were in the place of that man's wife, forgive him, Lady Rydal?"

There was a puzzled expression for some minutes in the fair pure face; then the blue eyes filled with tears.

"Yes" she replied, gently, "If I were his wife I could forgive him."

"Thank Heaven, I hear you say so!" cried Sister Marie. "And the poor girl? If you had to judge her, should you be very hard on her?"

"No, indeed, I should not poor girl! Why Sister Marie, hers is the saddest story I have ever heard."

"If you were to judge her, Lady Rydal, would you place her where the woman kneels in the picture you were speaking about, the woman whom you said reminded you of Vivian, Countess Lynn of—would you place her there?"

"May Heaven forbid!" cried Lady Rydal. "No, I should not place her there. She repented in time. It was in outward appearance she sinned most."

"Now you see why I have told you this true story, Lady Rydal. It may be that those you judged—with justice I admit—are not more guilty than the two of my story."

'I am afraid, I do not think, there could be two such stories in the world—I do not indeed!"

And Sister Marie looked up in alarm—and unsuspicious Lady Rydal had not the faintest idea that such a story could ever refer to her.

"I am afraid," she repeated, "the woman who took my husband from me was evidently a bold and bad one. She was not at all like the unhappy girl you know."

"How can you tell, dear? It is just possible that she may have a history even more sorrowful. If she had, you would forgive her, would you not?"

But forgiveness did not come so easily this time; no tears rose to the blue eyes, but a flush burned the fair face.

"It was a cruel, unwomanly thing to do," she said, slowly; "Vivian, Countess of Lynn, must have known that my husband was married, therefore she was the more guilty."

"It is just possible she did not," said Sister Marie.

"If she did not, the greater blame lies with my husband," cried Lady Lynn. "If he hid from her the fact that he was a married man, so much the worse for him."

"Tell me one thing," persisted Sister Marie; "if ever it came to your knowledge that this woman, Vivian, Countess of Lynn, was so deceived, would you forgive her then?"

"Yes," said Lady Rydal, "I would forgive her then."

"All comes in Heaven's own time," said Sister Marie. "And now, dear Lady Rydal, to return to the discussion with which we started. If your husband returns will you forgive him? Your heart is so gentle——"

"My heart has been bruised and broken," interrupted Lady Rydal, "bruised and broken."

"Still it lives, and living, must plead for one who loved you."

"But one who deserted me——"

"Say rather one tempted beyond his strength and led away," cried Sister Marie. "Oh, Lady Rydal, it is not now—it is not only of the present you have to think, but of the future. Tell me, dear, if you were lying on your deathbed now, which should you wish that you had done, if all earth lay behind you and you saw only the glory of heaven?"

"I should wish then that I had forgiven him," said Lady Rydal.

"Will you not say now what you wish to have done then?" she asked.

There was a moment's pause, then Lady Rydal clasped her arms round the sister's neck.

"Sister Marie," she said, "if my husband comes to ask my pardon, I will forgive him with all my heart."

CHAPTER LXIV.

Sir Lionel Rydal had not been the happiest man in the world. In fact, he had been altogether so overwhelmed with shame and mortification, with self-reproach and humiliation, that he cared very little for life at all. Never, he said to himself, had any man made so complete and perfect a failure. He had not been able to realize that Vivian was telling him the truth, that she meant what she said, and would see him no more; it had come upon him with such sudden surprise, with such a shock of wonder, that he had not yet realized it.

He had stood on the sands of Calais and watched the beautiful figure vanish in the mist that rose from the sea. He had cried out after her, but the mist had hidden her from his view, and he had not seen her again.

It was rather because he did not know what to do with himself than from any other motive that he had gone on to Paris. When the bell of the train rang he went back mechanically to the station; he had lost something from his life. He was like a man stunned by a violent blow, yet even with that blow there was a faint, unrecognized sense of relief. He was not by nature a bad or wicked man; he often said to himself that he had glided into this sin, that he had fallen into it by such imperceptible degrees he hardly knew how he had fallen.

He went back to the steamer; his first impulse was to follow her, for it seemed to him cowardly and cruel to leave her there in the mist of the dawning morning, but she had forbidden it so completely, so thoroughly, he knew it was useless; she would evade or avoid him even if he did so.

One or two of his fellow-passengers who had travelled from London looked at him wonderingly when he returned without the beautiful face which had so attracted them.

They spoke of it to each other, though, as they did not fail to observe, it was no business of theirs—not the least in the world. Still, this lady and gentleman had travelled with them.

It had seemed to be an understood thing that they were going on by train together, and now, as the gentleman came back to the station, he was alone. Alone, and looked so strange, so white, so wild.

One, a little more daring than the others, remarked, "Going on alone, sir?" but the scowl and frown with which that remark was received, effectually daunted him and prevented all further inquiries.

Yes, he was going on alone: the will-o'-the-wisp which led him so far had vanished: he had followed a fast light and had lost it. How those words struck him, "Going on alone." He tried not to think as the train flew on, he tried to drive all thought and regret from him, but they would not leave him. If he closed his eyes, first the beautiful face would come to him radiant with happiness, the dark eyes on fire with love, the crimson lips so near to his own, happy for the first and last time in her life; then he would wake with a start, close his eyes once more, and see the same beautiful face again, drowned this time in tears and white with despair. He moaned aloud that he had wished he had never seen her: he would give all he possessed in this world if they had never met.

Where was she? While he was seated there, with the noise of the wheels and the engine in his ear—where was she? Had she gone back to the lonely sea and thrown herself in?—had she gone to some of the hotels in Paris?—had she taken any steps toward returning to England? What would she do?—what would become of her? If she had only been less impassioned, more calm, more reasonable; if she had only listened to him; if she had waited and let him make some arrangements for her—all would have been well.

As it was, he could not bear the burden of his own thoughts about her—the anguish of his own regret. Even when the train steamed into the station at Paris, his first thought was, where was she? There was nothing for it but to go to Meurice's where he had ordered rooms; and if he gnashed his teeth when he reached there, no one was any the wiser.

"We expected a lady with you, monsieur," said the attentive waiter. "The telegram spoke of one."

"Yes but she will not arrive till later," was the hasty reply.

"A great deal of madame's luggage has arrived," said the waiter. "What shall be done with it?"

And monsieur replied that it should be stored away until madame arrived; and, for all that he knows, it waits for her

there till this day. He said to himself that he would make no change in his arrangements. It was true that she had seemed most resolved and most determined, but it was within the bounds of possibility that she should change her mind, and come to him there. He would remain for a few days at least.

From there he posted his letter to the Earl of Lynn, but he did not add to it that the helpless young girl had left him, had declined to go any farther with him, and they had parted forever. He said no word of this, but told Lord Lynn that he should remain at Meurice's for ten days, and if he wanted satisfaction he would give it to him. No answer to that letter came, and no tidings of Vivian. The people in the hotel wondered greatly what had happened to the handsome young Englishman, who looked so miserable and so depressed. They fancied he had lost money, for the discreet manager who had received the telegram said no word about "madame," who had not arrived.

As the day passed on he saw his fate more clearly. There was no news from Lord Lynn, no news from Vivian. It was evident the old earl would take no steps, it was equally evident that Vivian never intended to come to him. It dawned upon him at last that by his weakness and folly he had recklessly ruined and lost three lives.

What was he to do? Staying there any longer was useless, there was no object in it; as for returning to England his heart turned sick at the very thought of it; he could never do that. Wherever his wondering footsteps led him there he must go, but never home; he dare not think of Elinore; she knew the worst now. He had told her so plainly in that letter of his sin; no words that he could write now would ever alter it. How bitterly he repented having ever written these words,—

"The beautiful guilty partner of my flight is Vivian Countess of Lynn."

How false and absurd they seemed now that Vivian had left him.

How he wished with all his heart that he had not written that letter; but for it he could go back even now and ask Elinore to forgive him; but never after that; it was not possible, it was not probable. She must hate him now as much as he hated and loathed himself.

But where was he to go?—what could he do? Could it be possible that all his life was ruined by that one fatal act of folly? Could it be possible that he, for the rest of his life, was to be a wanderer on the face of the globe? Surely Heaven

would not punish him so terribly, so horribly! And yet if the lessons he had been taught in childhood were true, no punishment could be great enough. "What was he to do?" He asked himself that question morning, noon, and night—at all times and in all places—yet no answer came to him.

Quite accidentally, in the great saloon of the hotel, he met with a traveller who had been in Egypt and was returning there, and he told such wonders of the country that Sir Lionel felt inclined to go there, if a feeling so faint as that which woke in his heart could be called an inclination. At least a journey to Egypt would take him out of himself and give him some fresh thoughts. The name of the traveller was Willie Nicholl; he is knighted now and his name is known all over the world; but in those days he was only beginning what became afterwards a most successful career.

He was going to Alexandria, and intended staying there for some time.

"If you have nothing to do with yourself," he said to Sir Lionel, "you had better come with me."

"I have nothing to do, and I shall be glad to go with you," replied the unhappy man. "I believe honestly that if I am left to myself much longer I shall go mad."

"You have a secret in your life, then?" said Willie Nicholl.

"It would be useles to deny that," said Sir Lionel.

"Then come with me. For the cure of a secret, for the cure of a sorrow, there is nothing like hard work and plenty of it. Come with me, and I will find you plenty to do. I thought there was something wrong. A baronet, young, and good-looking, with a fine estate of his own, would not be living here in this despondent, miserable way, if there was not something wrong. You have not committed a murder, have you?"

"No," replied Sir Lionel; "but I have done worse."

"Worse," cried Willie Nicholl; "then it must, indeed, be bad."

"It is bad," said the baronet, moodily; "very bad."

"A woman, of course," said the traveller, after a pause.

"Women," replied Sir Lionel.

"Ah! two of them," said Willie Nicholl; "that makes it worse."

They were together two years after that conversation; but Willie Nicholl, like the true, staunch soul he was, asked no more questions, and never alluded again to it. It was sufficient for him to know that his friend was in trouble over two women. Whether they were wife, sister, mother, or rivals he did not

know. He respected the young man's sorrow, and did his best to lighten it. They were some time in Alexandria, and then Willie Nicholl persuaded the young baronet to go down the Nile with him.

"You will be pleased, if you go," he said persuasively. "Your brain and mind will be filled with new ideas, new thoughts; it will take you quite out of yourself. You will find the world larger and grander than you have believed. Be my friend and comrade, will you?"

"I will," replied Sir Lionel, and the compact thus made was never broken.

CHAPTER LXV.

THAT journey down the Nile, with its wonders, its novelties, its never-ending beauties, was the turning point of Sir Lionel's life. Before that he had been light of purpose, light of heart, careless, reckless in a certain fashion; he had lived his own life, and the life of others had not greatly interested him: he had not thought much of the wonders of creation, or the marvellous works that make the world so wonderful.

Now a new life came to him; the constant companionship of the clever, thoughtful, intellectual traveller did wonders for him, and Sir Lionel marvelled at the difference between men and men. Those he met in London had few topics of conversation—the beauty of a woman's face, the amount some friend or other had lost at play, the grace and finish of the last *danseuse*, the probable winner of the Derby or the Oaks, the last piquant scandal, these were the themes that engrossed them; among the more earnest portion of the community, politics, literature, and the fine arts diversified the matter.

But *this* man, with his great, beautiful soul full of reverence, his great, earnest heart full of truth and wonder, differed from them as diamonds from paste. He had a magnificent soul; he was not one of the polished, highly-cultivated men who abound on the surface of the globe, but he was a gentleman at heart.

He lived only for science; no woman's face had ever tempted him from his mistress. If ever he thought of love or marriage, it was with a mild wonder that men should concern themselves so deeply over what seemed to him such trifles.

No wonder, no beauty of creation, ever escaped him: he saw beauty in the humblest weed, in the smallest shell that lay on the sea-shore, in the least drop of water, in the tiniest leaf that grew upon a tree, the least blade of grass.

His mind was a storehouse of wonders, and listening to him was better than reading the finest book or listening to the finest sermon.

"From nature's work to nature's God," was his constant and unwearying text. To live with such a man was in itself an education, and Sir Lionel profited by it.

The wonders of the grand old country were unveiled before him; he saw the mighty river, the very home of mystery and romance; he saw the great Pyramids, the Sphinx, the ancient monuments of a grandeur that has no parallel. Each and all left their separate impression on him. It struck him every day with fresh wonder how frivolous were the ordinary lives of men. Looking at these magnificent monuments of antiquity, he felt ashamed of the want of greatness in his own life, of his frivolous, weak, foolish, vain ways. Even the pursuit of pleasure seemed very small to him then, and the love of women smaller still; but the great stars of honor and loyalty, the grand light of a noble life burned before him more brightly than they had ever done. And with the great longing for a better, nobler, and more useful life came a great and humble sorrow for the wrong he had committed. How small and mean all his pursuits seemed to him now. He had so eagerly sought pleasure, no matter in what shape, whether it was sport, hunting, shooting, fishing, whether it was in the fair words of praise that were always so pleasing to him, while the duties of life were certainly and most cruelly neglected. Where was the wife whom heaven had given to love and cherish? Where were the children committed to his care? Where the inferiors depending on him?

Where was he, who should have been the guide of all? Why even the servants of his household could not utter his name without blushing. There was not much in such a life as this. How he wished that with his youth he might have had experience.

Willie Nicholl had grown very fond of his companion; he was pleased, too, to see the change that had come over him; how the despair, the cynicism, the bitterness that had filled his heart, was gradually giving way to a nobler, higher, better feeling—how his mind and brain were growing into higher, freer thought. And Willie Nicholl never preached to him from

any other than the wonders of creation, and those words—"From nature's work to nature's God."

They were the best and truest of friends; they talked for long hours, but never argued: the stronger mind at once mastered the weaker one and retained its ascendency.

They came to Cairo, a city in which Willie Nicholl revelled, but Sir Lionel seemed anxious to quit.

"Why do you not wish to remain here, Lionel?" asked his friend. "Do you not like the place!"

"Yes it is not that, but there are so many English here, and I do not care about meeting any English."

"Still the old skeleton in the closet," said Willie.

"Yes, it is still there, and not likely to leave me," replied Sir Lionel. "There is no friend so faithful as that same skeleton. Do not stop in Cairo, Will."

"Not against your wish, certainly," said the traveller.

That same evening they were sitting together in the balcony smoking, and enjoying what was supposed to be some real "Bass' Bitter," when Willie Nicholl looked up suddenly at his friend.

"We have been true friends and trusty comrades now, Lionel, for some years," he said. "We have shared the same dangers, the same perils, the same purse. We are true friends. Now, I feel inclined to ask you at last the story and the secret of your life. This kind of existence is right for me; I am a traveller by nature. I could never have been anything else. Home and home-ties, home affections, have no great interest for me. Explorers, like poets, are born, not made. I am at home in my life—wish for no other; and if I could go home to-morrow to England, to live at my ease on ten thousand a year, I would not do it. But with you it is different; you were not born to be a traveller, and in all probability you have ties at home."

"I have, indeed," groaned Sir Lionel.

"I do not think it would answer for you to lead this wandering life always," said Willie Nicholl. "I have studied your character, and see just what you are fitted for. I do not urge you to tell me your secret, but I think it will do you good to trust in me—I may help you, too."

"I assure you," replied Sir Lionel, "that I have no hesitation in telling you my story but this—that I am quite ashamed of it."

"You are not the first or only man who has made great mistakes," said Willie. "Who has not? It is as natural for men to make mistakes as it is for sparks to fly upwards."

"But I was a coward!" cried Sir Lionel. "Men will forgive each other almost anything, but they seldom forgive the fact that a man has been a coward."

"We two have stood by each other while death has stared us in the face—death by fire and by water, by hunger and cold, by the sword of men and the tusks of wild beasts, yet I never found you a coward, Lionel."

Sir Lionel shook his head gravely.

"My cowardice was of a different nature," he said, "it was moral, not physical. In the first place, I could not resist the prayers of a beautiful woman; in the second, I could not find the courage to go back to those I had wronged. I will tell you old friend and comrade, the story of my life, and you shall judge me as you will."

"It will make no difference to me, Lionel," said the traveller. "I have loved but few people in my life, but you are one of them. With me to love once is to love always; nothing that you can tell me, will make any difference to me; I have found you true, brave, loyal, courageous, and noble, and I shall think of you always, love you always, as I have found you. You may tell me frankly what you will about yourself without fear."

Sir Lionel was silent for some minutes. It was a terrible effort for him to make. He loved William Nicholl, he was proud of the great traveller's liking for him; proud of their friendship.

In his secret heart he had been flattered by Willie's admiration for him; they were strangely mated, yet they thoroughly agreed, and now he had to tell the story which would in all human probabillty destroy his friend's liking and admiration both. It was a trial, and he looked gravely anxious over it. Willie Nicholl noted it, but waited patiently.

"He is a good fellow," thought Willie, "a fine fellow, too good to be allowed to go to the bad in this way, too good for his whole life to be wasted in what may only be a folly, some unfortunate love affair; how many men, good and true men, split upon that track.

"I can understand a man going mad if he fails to find the source of a river, fails to find his way into the heart of an unknown land, fails to find out that on which he has set his whole heart; but to go mad over a woman, or over women, it is past my comprehension, it is indeed."

"I am long in beginning," said Sir Lionel, taking up another cigar.

"I can wait," replied his friend, "there is no immediate

hurry: you need not tell me to-night, wait until another day if you will."

"No," said Sir Lionel, "if it be done at all, let it be now. I should like you to understand the strength of my temptation, and the weakness of my fall. I have hardly been able to measure the extent of my own guilt. You shall measure it for me."

"It is true," said Willie Nicholl, "that I have studied the world of nature more deeply than the world of men; but I must say this one thing: I have never yet met with a man who had not in his life made great mistakes—committed great sins—been guilty of great follies. Now, why should you be more ashamed than the rest of us?"

"Only that I have been more foolish and more wicked than the generality of men," said Sir Lionel.

"That is a very candid admission," said Willie Nicholl. "Before you tell me your story, I should like to know one thing. You say that you will be content with my judgment—that I shall tell you frankly and honestly the full measure of your guilt."

"Yes, I mean that," said Sir Lionel.

"I will do it," said Willie, honestly as ever a man spoke; "but you must let me do one thing more. You must let me find you the remedy; and you must promise me to abide by it; will you?"

"Yes," said Sir Lionel, "I will. Whatever you think it best for me to do I will do. I give you my word for it!"

CHAPTER LXVI.

THE story was told. When Sir Lionel began his recital a hot sun was shining in the heavens; when he finished, the large white moon had turned to silver everything it shone upon. Willie Nicholl had spoken never a word. Not by question or comment had he interrupted the course of that narrative, and only Heaven knew how great the relief of telling that story was to Sir Lionel. It had festered in his heart, it had rankled in his blood: he had brooded over it until his whole life was shadowed, and marred and spoiled.

Now, even as the shameful words left his lips, his heart seemed lighter.

"I have done well to tell him," he said, as he waited for his friend's verdict. "I feel better even now."

But Willie Nicholl sat looking very grave, he had imagined that his friend had some strange story to tell, but he had not thought of anything like this. He had never met with anything like it in all his experience. Better, after all, the study of rivers and seas, of hills and mountains, of forest and jungle, of sandy desert and open plain, than of mankind.

"Now," said Sir Lionel, "I have told you the plain, simple, horrible truth; do not spare me; tell me frankly what you think of me!"

"I will," replied his friend. "In the first place, I admit it is most assuredly the strangest story I have ever heard. It is a most unsatisfactory story. If I had read it, I should have made this remark to myself, that the characters in it are not satisfactory. You for instance, you wanted either greater goodness or greater wickedness: either you should have resisted the temptation from the first, or you should have—well, you should have managed differently; and that poor girl, too, Vivian, Countess of Lynn, she should have been better or worse; either she should have resisted the temptation from the beginning, or she should have remained with you. There is a weakness about you both; or perhaps, if I gave it its right name, I should say a strength in her that I do not understand. It seems strange that she was willing to leave her husband, and yet would not take you from your wife and children."

"Tell me," said Sir Lionel, boldly, "what you think of me. Do not spare me."

"I think," said the great traveller, slowly, "that you acted entirely without principle. You were true to neither woman—not to the wife you loved, and not to the woman who loved you. I see all to blame, and nothing to admire in your conduct; in Lady Lynn I see much to admire."

"You agree that I was a coward?"

"Yes. Physically brave, you were a coward then, and your cowardice has ruined three lives."

Sir Lionel had asked for the truth; but now, as he heard it, it hit him hard. He winced under it.

"That is your judgment of me," he said, "and you love me. You are my friend; think for me what the jugdment of other men will be, and ask yourself if I can ever go among them again."

"Yes," replied Willie Nicholl; "I think you can. I will tell you all I think. To begin with—it is a bad case—weak, foolish—a useless wreck of three valuable lives. The weakness of men and the vanity of women—the reckless selfishness of both—are well exemplified. Your wife, Elinore, Lady Rydal, seems to me to be a queen among woman—an angel of goodness, of uprity, and devotion."

"She is all that and more," said Sir Lionel, sadly.

"You forsook the substance for the shadow," said Willie Nicholl.

"I did," replied Sir Lionel. Yet as he uttered the words, something in his heart pleaded for Vivian—poor Vivian, who had loved him so well, yet who had given him up.

He could not bear to hear hard words said of her, and yet it was he who had dragged her down from her high estate.

"In my heart," continued Willie Nicholl, "I am most sorry for Lady Rydal. It seems to me the whole weight of the sin has fallen on her; and that a young, beautiful, innocent woman should suffer so terribly from the faults of others is a cruel and most bitter thing."

"I am sorry, too," he continued, "for the girl who loved you, a beautiful, impassioned, lovely, lonely woman, according to your description. Her story seems to me simply piteous—piteous in the extreme. For yourself—old friend and old comrade none the less dear for your sin—for yourself I have no pity. Your want of principle, your reckless playing with fire, has ended as such things always end, and you must suffer to the end of your life for your sin."

"I know it," replied Sir Lionel, sadly.

"There is one thing I do think," continued Willie Nicholl, "and it is this—you are bound to do what you can to retrieve your position: at present it is one of humiliation and shame. There is nothing on earth so bad but that it may be improved. Certainly you can improve on the present state of things. What do you suppose has become of Lady Lynn?"

"I do not know," replied Sir Lionel. "And that is one of my greatest troubles. I never forget her, and I never cease to wonder where she is or what has become of her."

"Lynn!" repeated the great traveller. "There is something in that name familiar to me. I have seen it somewhere, and very lately, too."

Sir Lionel looked anxiously at him.

"Have you? Try to remember where and how."

"I do remember," said Willie. "It was in one of the En-

glish hotels. You would not go with me lest you should meet English people and I read all the papers. I remember very well it was the death of Lord Lynn."

"I wonder," interrupted Sir Lionel, "if she had gone back to him."

"No, I am sure she had not, because this very paragraph spoke of her disappearance, and said that no news had been heard of her since."

"So he is dead," said Sir Lionel. "I hope he has forgiven me the wrong I did him."

"He was never very happy with her, I suppose?" said Willie.

"I should think he must have been quite forty years older than she was, and he was a stern, irritable old man. She had a miserable life of it, poor child! How beautiful and loving she was!"

"Worthy of a better fate," said Willie.

"Yes, worthy of a better fate. She is free, then—she can marry again."

And he wondered if the beautiful, impassioned woman who had loved him so dearly would ever learn to care for any one else.

"It seems to me, Lionel," said Willie Nicholl, "that you ought to set this lady straight in the eyes of the world; indeed, I think you ought to have done it long ago. It is a cruel omission.'

"What should I do—what ought I to have done?" cried Sir Lionel.

"Why, instead of going round the world as you have done, my dear old comrade, your first care should have been to clear the character of a most unfortunate lady. You ought either to have gone back to England, or you should have written to the Earl of Lynn, your own lawyers—any one to establish her innocence. Every one thinks she has been with you the whole of this time, and you are to blame for it."

"You are right," cried Sir Lionel, "I ought to have done it, but it has never once occurred to me."

"If I were in your place," continued his friend, "I should not go to sleep to-night till that act of justice had been done. Lord Lynn's death gives you an excellent opportunity—most excellent. You can write and say that from what is reported in the papers, you find that Lady Lynn has not returned to England, but that she left you on the day you quitted England, and you have not seen her since."

"Would you really do that?" asked Sir Lionel.

"I would indeed, Lionel, without loss of time; every moment that the present belief exists in the mind of people is wrong to her."

"I wish I had thought of it before," said Sir Lionel.

"It would have been better; but it is not too late. They to whom you write, you see, will think that the paragraphs in the paper have caused your letter."

"But will that suffice? Will writing to them be of any use?"

"Of course it will. In a short time you will find that every paper in England has the news. There is nothing, to my mind, more wonderful than the manner in which news percolates—if I may so express it—through all classes and ranks of society? Before your letter has been two weeks in England, every one will have heard of it. The society papers will have got hold of it first; then, in all probability, two of them will quarrel as to which had the news first, and then you are safe."

"I will do it before I sleep," said Sir Lionel. "The matter never occurred to me in that light. Poor Vivian! I would have done what I could."

"Then I have a second piece of advice to give you, which may seem hard and impossible, but if you are a wise man you will follow it; that is, go home at once, without delay, and ask your wife's pardon."

Sir Lionel grew pale with emotion as he heard the words.

"Go home!" he gasped; "I can never do that, Will."

"So you have taught yourself to believe," said the great traveller; "but it is all nonsense. You can go home whenever you will or please."

"I have never thought of it as a possibility," he stammered.

"Or you would have done it before now. Going away was a bad thing; but stopping away is even worse. You say you have never thought of it as a possibility. Why not?"

For the first time in their conversation Sir Lionel's eyes filled with tears.

"It has always seemed to me," he replied, simply, "that I have sinned beyond pardon."

"No man can do that. From all you say of your wife, I am quite sure that she will forgive you. Why make bad worse, Lionel?"

"But," said Sir Lionel, in a broken voice, "I do not deserve it; I do not indeed!"

"She will be the best judge of that. You try her," said Willie.

"I am almost tempted to go," said Sir Lionel; and his old friend grasped his hand.

"Do go, Lionel," he said. "Every man makes mistakes. A brave man meets the consequences of sin. Go—you may atone yet for all the evil you have wrought—at least, you can do your best. It would be far better to go back and try to make the rest of your wife's life happy than to let her remain in the misery she lives in now."

"Poor Elinore!" signed Sir Lionel. "I am sure of this, Will—when I look back on the folly of my life, I wonder at myself. I can hardly believe that any natural man ever behaved in such a fashion; but," he added, "I think I will take your advice. I will go home and try my fate."

"I give you that advice quite against my own interest," said Willie Nicholl. "I shall lose a true friend and a trusty comrade; but it is best for you."

They said little more, while the moon was shining in the dark blue sky; but that same night Sir Lionel wrote his letter, and on the morning following he set sail for home

CHAPTER LXVII.

QUICKLY as Sir Lionel tried to reach home the news was there before him, for midway on his journey he fell ill, and that delayed him—ill with regret and remorse and nervous anxiety. He was so impatient to reach home that he did not even take the ordinary precaution of travellers; he could not eat or sleep or rest; he could do nothing but count the hours that lay between him and home. He could not understand his own blindness then, it was incredible to him that he had not taken some steps before this to clear Vivian; he ought to have done it the very first thing, yet it had never occurred to him until a stranger suggested it; and now he felt that his heart was on fire, that he should know no rest until the whole world was well assured of the truth.

So he hurried on, and as is usual with those who hurry too much, he lost time. He fell ill with longing and regret, added to which was a low fever which threatened mischief, induced by a violent cold which he caught on deck.

"I must go on," he said, piteously, to the doctor who

attended him: "I have a matter of life and death in England—I must get home."

"You will travel at the peril of your life," was the stern reply, "and you will gain nothing by your haste, Unless you carry out my directions to the very letter you will never reach home alive."

So that Sir Lionel had no choice but to remain until he was well enough to go on. The parting with Willie Nichol had been a sad one; they had been such intimate and constant friends for so many years that now it was hard to separate.

"I do not know what husbands and wives feel who have lived together for many years and have to part," said the great traveller, with tears in his eyes, "but I will never believe any one man has loved another so well as I love you!"

Sir Lionel made him promise that when his business at Cairo was finished he would visit him in England.

"I do not know where I may be," he said, "whether I shall go to my home at Dunwold, or whether I shall live in London."

"I would not try that again," interrupted his friend, and Sir Lionel's face flushed hotly. "Wherever I may be," he said, "it will be home for you, and you must come to me. A year in England will be a pleasant change."

"I will come," said Willie, with a grasp of the hand that was more eloquent than words; "I will come.

But the news reached England before him—news that was at first received with incredulity, then believed. Sir Lionel wrote strongly, and his first letter was to Messrs. Forsett & Co., the late earl's lawyers—a letter that fell like a bomb-shell in the office, and completely routed those most excellent of men. It stated briefly that Sir Lionel Rydal's attention had been called, while he was in Egypt, to a paragraph going the rounds of the papers with reference to the death of the late Lord Lynn. In that paragraph the disappearance of the Countess of Lynn from home was commented upon, and it was stated that since that disappearance no tidings whatever had been received from her. Sir Lionel begged to say most emphatically that since the day he left England he had never seen or heard of the Countess of Lynn; that they had travelled together as far as Calais, where they parted, and had not met again; that he was perfectly ignorant of her whereabouts; that the rumor generally believed that she was with him, was a most false one; that he challenged the most perfect inquiry, and could produce any number of witnesses to prove the truth of his words. He added that if he had known of this prevalent notion that Lady

Lynn was with him, he would have written three years ago to dispel and contradict it: but he had been travelling in remote lands, and until he read of Lord Lynn's death, he had been quite ignorant of the fate of Lady Lynn.

He asked them, as a matter of justice to her, to put his letter in the form of a paragraph, and let it be well circulated, as it was but an act of justice to the deeply injured lady.

Messrs. Fortnett & Co. were more startled than they had ever been in their lives before. Was it true? the members of the firm asked each other. Then they agreed that it must be so, or Sir Lionel would never have written that letter or courted inquiry.

"I wish," said Mr. Fortnett, senior, "that the old earl had lived to know this."

"It would have been a grand thing for him," said the junior Mr. Fortnett. "He never forgot the blow to his pride. We must send a copy of this letter to the new lord," which was done.

The two old lawyers looked at each other. Many strange stories had come to their knowledge. They had possession of many secrets that would have startled most people; but they had no case as strange as this. This young and beautiful woman had left her husband's home, her magnificence, luxury, and high position, as it was supposed, for love of the handsome face of Sir Lionel. Yet, true it was, clearly proved, clearly stated, that from the very day she quitted home she had been a stranger to him

"Why did she do it?" asked the junior of the senior.

"Heaven only knows!" was the answer. "It could not have been as every one thought—from love."

Messrs. Fortnett & Co. did their duty. A paragraph was drawn up which went the round of the papers, and created a sensation such as is seldom experienced in English society.

Lady Lynn had been so well known, so popular, her beauty grace, and wit had made her so pre-eminent, her disappearance from society had created so great a panic, that to find all that had been said and written about her untrue, was a nine day's wonder—even greater than that of her flight. The news was well discussed, and strange to say for such a cruel slanderous world—it was well received and thoroughly believed.

Then Sir Lionel, who had declared to himself that he had done no good thing by half, wrote to his own lawyer, Wilson, telling him the same story. That was a much stronger letter.

"If I had known," wrote Sir Lionel, "that this foul slander

was fully believed, I should have returned to refute it. I authorize you to make it known to every one whom it may concern, that for reasons I am not compelled to mention, I did leave England with Lady Lynn, and travelled as far as Calais with her; but that we parted at Calais the same evening, and I have never seen her since. I wish you to publish this fact to the whole world for me. I shall soon publish it for myself."

He forgot in his haste and excitement, to add that he was returning home, and as his letter was dated Egypt, Mr. Wilson did not expect him home.

"Rather late in the day," said the lawyer to himself. "I do not doubt him, but he should have written this three years ago."

Mr. Wilson did his best, and the first step he took was writing to the squire, and inclosing to him a copy of Sir Lionel's letter, and the effect of that letter on the squire can better be imagined that described.

"I know Lady Rydal is ill," said Mr. Wilson, in his letter. "I dare not send it to her lest, in her delicate state, it might injure her. I believe every word of it. For many reasons I have been convinced lately that Lady Lynn is not with Sir Lionel. I believe him, but I must add that I believe your son-in-law, and my client, to be quite mad. Why they took the trouble to leave England together to part at Calais, and never to meet again, must remain the mystery it is until Sir Lionel himself choose to solve it."

The squire read that letter with a mixture of feelings that could never be described. Certainly Sir Lionel had taken the old earl's beautiful wife from her home. Could any words have been plainer than those?

"The beautiful, guilty partner of my flight is Vivian, Countess of Lynn."

If she had not gone with him, why did he say so? And why had they parted? The squire stamped and raved. He called his son-in-law some very ugly names; he exhausted himself in finding terms bad enough for him. Then,—as was usual with him in times of embarrassment—he went to consult his wife. He was staying with her and little Blossom at St. Louis.

Mrs. Gordon read it through.

"I hope it is true, Angus," she said. "It will make all the difference in the world to Elinore if that letter tells the truth. I should never be surprised at his returning, and at their being friends again."

"But," said the squire, "where is the other? What has become and what is to become of her?"

"That is no business of ours," said the lady. "We must attend to and think of Elinor first. You go at once, Angus, to the villa, and let her see that letter. It will do her more good than all the doctor's medicine put together."

The squire, like an obedient, well-trained husband, went off at once. He was just as much delighted as his wife, but side by side with his delight was the burning indignation that one man feels when he longs to horsewhip another.

At the villa he found Lady Rydal better; the child was the same, making little or no progress, but the mother was improving. It was Sister Marie who told him this, and she looked so pale and ill that the squire's heart was touched with great pity.

"I want to see my daughter," he said, "as soon as possible, sister. I have some good news for her."

"I am glad of that," she replied, wondering in her secret heart what that good news could be, and if it referred to Sir Lionel. "Lady Rydal is so much better," she said, "that a little good news will cure her."

"I suppose," said the squire, looking fixedly at Sister Marie, "that you know about it?"

The pale, beautiful face flushed the deepest crimson.

"If you mean," she said, "that I know Lady Rydal's story —yes. She has told all to me."

"And you would give her good advice, I am sure," said the squire heartily.

"The advice I gave to Lady Rydal was this," said Sister Marie, "that if her husband returned to her and asked her forgiveness, it would be wise to grant it."

The squire's kindly face darkened a little.

"Did you tell her that?" he cried.

"Yes, I did: and any sensible person who wished her well would tell her the same thing," said Sister Marie.

"You stand to your guns," he replied; but he paused as Sister Marie, in a voice full of emotion, said,—

"No father ever loved his child more than you love Lady Rydal," she said "Do not oppose her happiness. She can no more be well or happy without her husband than flowers can grow without rain and sunshine. If he comes back to her, do not interfere, let her forgive him, and be as happy with him as she can."

"I shall not interfere," said the squire; "if I did, it would be to kill him. If I had my will, I would kill him; but I must

do as the lady in the song says—I must smother my feelings."

"You must indeed," said Sister Marie, gravely.

"I feel," said the squire, "as though I could forgive him freely if I might have one shot at him. But you may trust me, sister, when the time comes; you may indeed. Now I will go to Lady Rydal. My wife says the good news I have for her will do her more good than all the doctors' medicine in the world."

"Is it of—of her husband?" asked Marie, with a faltering voice.

"Yes," replied the squire, "it is of him, if any news of or from him can be called good. I doubt it."

He did not notice that the beautiful face before him had grown white even to the lips.

"Is he coming back?" she asked, slowly.

"No," said the squire, "it is nothing of that kind. He is still in Egypt, and I should call Egypt a very happy country for holding him. No, the news that I bring is—that black as he is, he is not as black as he is painted, after all, though he is black enough, in all conscience."

The squire went to his daughter's room, and found her better. What passed between them, when he read that letter to her, no one ever knew. When he left her room, he had tears in his eyes.

Soon afterward she sent for Sister Marie, who found her with a light on her face and in her eyes that had not been there for years.

"Come and kiss me, sister," she cried. "You have consoled me so often, I must tell you my good news first. It is good news to me. Do you know what my husband, Sir Lionel, has been doing all these years, while we have been thinking he was with Vivian, Countess of Lynn?"

CHAPTER LXVIII.

It was a warm, bright day in August when a cab drew up at the door of Mr. Wilson's office, and a tall, bronzed, handsome man sprang from it as though he had not one moment to spare. He was so hurried, he looked so little to the right or the left, that he nearly knocked down every porter and every clerk who attempted to stop his progress.

"I want Mr. Wilson," he cried.

"Mr. Wilson is in his office," replied an injured clerk, who had narrowly escaped being knocked over, stool and all; "but why," he added to himself, "people should rush about like mad bears because they want to see Mr. Wilson is more than I can imagine."

Evidently the gentleman knew Mr. Wilson's office well. He made straight for the door, and stood before that astonished gentleman, his bronzed face quivering with emotion.

"Do you not know me?" he cried.

"I do not," replied Mr. Wilson, looking up in wonder at the agitated face.

"You must know me! I am Sir Lionel Rydal—you must know me!" And Mr. Wilson sprang from his seat.

"Sir Lionel! Heaven bless me! Why, of course I know you; but you are bronzed and bearded, you are changed. Welcome home!"

Then his enthusiasm died suddenly away; how could he feel pleased to see a man who had done as Sir Lionel had done. Sir Lionel was quick to notice the change.

"I have taken you by surprise, Wilson," he said, "but for Heaven's sake do not give me the cold shoulder, or look as if you were not pleased to see me."

"Nothing of the kind, Sir Lionel," cried the lawyer, trying to infuse a little more warmth into his manner; "I was merely surprised."

"You had not time to prepare yourself," said Sir Lionel.

"I thought you were still in Egypt, Sir Lionel."

"No; I had an illness on the way that has detained me, or I should have been here ten days since."

"Welcome home, Sir Lionel," said Mr. Wilson, but the baronet missed some heartiness from his voice.

Then Sir Lionel drew a chair to the table and sat down.

"Tell me everything," he said, quickly, "everything that has happened since I went. First tell me where is my wife?"

"Lady Rydal is with her children, the squire and his wife in the south of France," replied Mr. Wilson; and then he told all he knew about them, all that the world had said about him. He did not spare him, and the bronzed face burned as the baronet writhed under the lash of the lawyer's words. Mr. Wilson had always hoped one day to speak his mind, and he was delighted now to have the opportunity of doing it. Sir Lionel bore it well; it did not hurt him as the same words had done from the lips of his dear old comrade, Willie Nicholl. It was to be part of his penance, and he would take it as such.

When the old lawyer had finished, he held out his hand to him.

"Thank you, Wilson," he said, "you have spoken like an honest man; I have acted like a fool. Write fool and coward against my name, but write also that I am a repentant man. Wilson," he continued, looking at the lawyer's keen, shrewd face, "tell me what you think has become of Lady Lynn. I will tell you the whole truth of the matter. I shall want some one to help me find her! I am quite determined to find her." And then he told the astonished lawyer what had happened.

"I have never heard such an extraordinary story in my life!" he cried. "Unless you had told me yourself, I would not have believed it."

"Every word is true," said Sir Lionel.

Heaven bless us! What strange mortals there are in this world. To think that a man should fling away his life for so little, and that a woman should ruin hers for less.

"I cannot understand it!" he cried. "She gave up one of the finest positions in England for you—left her husband for you—yet would not go with you when she found you were married."

"That is just what happened," replied Sir Lionel.

"Well, I have never understood women, and I never shall do so," said Mr. Wilson, "so that it is useless for me to waste my time in trying to think what she could mean. Let us come to something practical, Sir Lionel. You wish that she should be found: that every means should be taken to trace her?"

"Yes, Wilson. You are a shrewd man of the world. Tell me, what do you think has become of her?"

"I could not tell. I might judge of an ordinary woman, I could not judge of her. Some women, under those circumstances, would have killed themselves at once, would have faced death rather than life: some would have gone straight to the bad, without loss of time: but this woman seems, strange to say, to have had a fine sense of honor, I should think it quite impossible to guess even what she has done: but I would undertake to say it is something noble."

"How well you understand her!" cried Sir Lionel.

"There are some patents of nobility that are to be seen by every one," said the lawyer, slowly. "It seems to me that your countess carries one."

"She is not *my* countess," replied Sir Lionel, gravely, and Mr. Wilson felt sorry that he had uttered the words.

"May I ask what your plans are, Sir Lionel?" said the lawyer, after a pause.

"I have none that are settled yet," he replied. "I shall remain in London for some time, and go the round of the clubs; then I must think."

"I hope you intend to go back to Lady Rydal, Sir Lionel? I have seen many sad sights in my life, but nothing like her anguish when I went down to Dunwold."

"Do not speak of it," cried Sir Lionel, his face paling underneath the bronze. "I cannot hear of it," he cried, with trembling lips. "I cannot, indeed. I will call in again, Mr. Wilson, and we will talk over matters; I am not strong yet."

"Come and dine with me this evening, Sir Lionel," said the lawyer, sorry for his client at last.

"Thank you. No, I am not fit for society yet. I must get stronger. I will see you before I leave London."

But much happened before these two met again. From there Sir Lionel went to his hotel. The very sight of London was painful to him. It had brought back all the pain and misery to him. He would not go near the West End or any place where he had been with Vivian; he avoided every spot where he had met her. He spent a miserable day at his hotel; then on the morning following he resolved upon going to his bankers.

He knew that there must be a large accumulation of money lying there, he had drawn so little. He was recognized at once. Messrs. Brown & Son, of the famous old bank, would be very slow to forget a customer like Sir Lionel Rydal.

It may be that they did not think they had any right to judge of his private affairs, for their greeting was warm enough and kind enough. Sir Lionel was asked into Mr. Brown's office, his hand warmly shaken, and the famous brown sherry produced that was only brought out for most important customers.

"A remarkable coincidence that you should call upon us to-day, Sir Lionel," said Mr. Brown. "We received this morning a letter from Lady Rydal, inclosing one for you, and asking us to do our best to forward it to you at once. It is marked important."

"I shall be glad to see it," said Sir Lionel.

He tried to speak calmly, but the breath came in hot gasps on his lips, and he took it with trembling hands.

"I hope it contains no bad news," said Mr. Brown courte-

ously. "You will perhaps like to read it alone," and with a courteous bow, the senior partner vanished.

Sir Lionel did not wait long; he tore the letter open with trembling fingers. Ah, yes, it was the familiar writing that he had always loved so much, so much. What was the matter? Gordon dangerously ill and pining for him—longing for him. Oh, Heaven what a coward and villain he had been!—what a miserable coward!—what a guilty, pitiful wretch!

His little son dangerously ill, and longing for him. How plainly he could see the little fellow; the proud little figure with its pretty pink limbs and childish grace, the beautiful, loving little face; how the boy would run to him; he could feel the clasp of the childish arms round his neck now, and the touch of the warm little lips on his face.

He fell on his knees—this man who had broken the laws of God and man—with a bitter cry, and he shed such tears as had never fallen from his eyes before. He had inflicted much suffering on others, he had suffered much himself, but that his child should be dying, and perhaps calling for him in vain, was a thing that broke his heart.

"It is bad news," he said to Mr. Brown, ten minutes afterward, "very bad. My little son is exceedingly ill. I must go to him at once. Where is this town of St Louis?"

Mr. Brown gave him full directions to get there quickly.

"I hope you will find him better, Sir Lionel," said the banker, heartily. "It is a sad thing, but children have nine lives, I am sure."

Sir Lionel set his teeth.

"It will go hard with me," he said, "if anything happens to the boy. I shall want money. Brown, give me what you can."

The banker proceeded to obey him.

"Send for a cab now at once," said Sir Lionel. "I shall be in time to start by the midday train. Send to my hotel for me—here is my card—say the rooms are to be secured until my return. Oh, my little son, please Heaven I may find you living and well."

In less than three hours he was steaming once more across the channel; this time he had bitter regret and remorse for his conduct, together with an awful dread as to how he might find his child.

It was a terrible journey for him, but he reached the little town of St Louis at last, and wondered why his wife had chosen a place so entirely out of the world.

Then he had to make inquiries as to where the villa lay;

and he was horror-stricken to hear of the terrible effects of the fever.

How nearly he had lost wife and children—how dreadful the danger had been and how they were saved, so the people of St. Louis told him, by the skill and devotion of the good sisters. He had gone at once to the best hotel in the place, L'Hotel de l'Imperatrice, and had taken rooms there. He became very friendly with the landlord, who was delighted to have an English milord under his roof to fleece at his pleasure; and from him Sir Lionel learned that the squire and Mrs. Gordon, with my lady's little daughter, were staying in St. Louis, while my lady, herself, and her little son, were both lying very ill at the villa.

"I will go there first," said the baronet to himself, "and see the squire afterwards—that will not be the most pleasant of interviews." And, so saying, he set off for the villa.

CHAPTER LXIX.

He thanked Heaven as he walked along the beautiful high road that led from St. Louis to the villa that the child was still living. They spoke of him as very ill, as wasting after a terrible fever, but not, thank Heaven, as dying.

How beautiful the weather was. The distant roll of the blue waters, the magnificent height of the great mountains, the groves of orange and lemon, the vines that grew wild, the thousands of fair flower that filled the air with scent.

Then he realized that he was going to see his wife, Elinore. How would she receive him?—what would she say to him?—how could he meet her, and look into those true, dear eyes again? Would to Heaven the meeting were over! It was not that he feared she would reproach him—that she would refuse to forgive him; he knew her gentleness of heart and loving pity too well to fear that; but he was ashamed. And when a man big, brave, and strong, owns to himself that he is ashamed, there is a great deal admitted and a great deal gained.

He was brave enough in the physical sense of the word; he had never known fear, he would face death courageously as any man; but when he saw the gray turrets of the villa his heart gave way.

How should he face her? Oh, Heaven, how should he look in that face again? He drew nearer, he saw the pretty terrace, with the white marble vases and crimson flowers, he saw the pretty garden seat under the drooping vines, he saw the beautiful old-fashioned garden with its wealth of roses and myrtles, he saw the grand groups of statuary, and the fountains that threw their white spray into the scented air.

Yet over all of it there was a silence that chilled his heart; it was unbroken save by the fall of the water, and the song of the birds, unbroken by the voice of a child, a snatch of song, and that silence terrified him. He saw all the long windows of the house thrown open to let in the sunshine, the fresh air, and the scent of roses. His heart gave a great bound of relief when he noted that there could be no one lying dead in those grand old walls. At the back of the house were the great gates and the stone courtyard where the orange trees in their green railings stood, but there was no sign of any living creature.

Sir Lionel felt nervous and awkward. He could not well mount the terrace steps and, ringing the bell, ask for his wife; he did not know how to enter the house.

Suddenly in the distance, coming slowly from the lawn to the courtyard, he saw a face and figure familiar to him.

"It is Bennett," he cried. "Now, Heaven be praised, I shall have some one to help me."

As he drew nearer he saw that the old man carried a little open basket in his hand, and that the basket held some bottles of medicine. Bennett's face was grave and sad, and Sir Lionel noted that his hair had grown from silvery gray to white.

He hastened to meet him, but when his shadow fell over the white stone, and Bennett looked up to see who it was, he did not recognize his old master in the bronzed, bearded man who spoke to him.

"He does not know me," thought Sir Lionel as he said,—

"Good-morning."

"Good-morning, sir," replied Bennett, as he wondered who he could be.

"You have a little child very ill here" he said. "How is he?"

The old man shook his head gravely.

"They say he is better—the doctor, the squire and the sister, but I don't. I see no improvement in him, nor do I think he will ever get well."

"But why?" asked Sir Lionel. "Why will he not?"

"He wants what he will never get," replied the old man, "and he will not get well without it."

"What is that?" asked Sir Lionel, knowing full well that he meant his father; but Bennett did not answer him; he seemed absorbed in his own thoughts.

"There is a lady ill also, is there not?" asked Lionel after a time.

"Yes, my lady is very ill," said the old servant, regretfully, "but they say she has taken the turn, and will get well."

"What has caused the fever?" asked Sir Lionel. "Does any one know?"

"No; no one knows. They say that in these countries fever lurks even in the rosebuds. But," continued the old man, suddenly awake to the fact that he was talking to a stranger, and that that stranger wanted something, "I beg your pardon, sir; you wanted to see some one?"

Then Sir Lionel looked straight in the old man's face.

"Bennett," he said, "do you not know me? Look at me. Of all the people in the world, you ought to know me."

The old man fell back with a low cry.

"Great Heaven!" he said, "it's Sir Lionel—my old master, Sir Lionel."

And even then, in the first moment of their meeting, Sir Lionel read disapproval in the face of his old servant.

"I never thought to see you again in this world, sir," he said, "never again. Thank Heaven you have come; now the young master will get well again."

"Is he so very ill?" asked Sir Lionel.

"Why, sir, it would have melted a heart of iron to see how that poor child has lain there crying for his papa; no one could comfort him, not even my lady herself."

"Bennett," said his master, "come with me, I must talk to you. I must be cautious how I see my lady and the child. Oh, Bennett! dear old fellow, I have been a miserable fool, but I hope to do better;" and those words brought tears to the old servant's eyes "Come with me," said Sir Lionel, "where no one can hear us speak, and tell me all about it."

They went away together; and if Sister Marie wondered why the old man did not return punctually with the medicine, she little dreamed of his reason why.

Bennett traced the old story back to the beginning when he had taken that fatal letter to the garden until now, but he dwelt at greatest length upon the sister.

"If my lady lives," he said, "it will be owing entirely to

the care that has been taken of her. She has been tended more carefully than I can tell. That lady—and mind you, Sir Lionel, although I don't hold with any of her ways and forms—although she wears that queer dress and has no name in particular to be called by, yet she is a lady—a duchess, I call her, and I am a good judge of women, Sir Lionel—she has saved my lady's life, and the young master's. When she came here she had a color in her face and light in her eyes, now they have worn away—she is very thin and very pale. She has given all her strength to them, Sir Lionel; you have her to thank, after Heaven, for the lives of those you love."

But Sir Lionel did not seem to be impressed with Bennett's views of the sister; he was anxious about my lady and Gordon. He had a hundred questions to ask—he wanted to know every particular of the illness.

"Do you think they will let me see her, Bennett?" he asked, impatiently.

"I should think not yet," was the old man's answer. "My lady is better, Sir Lionel, but she is still so ill you would hardly know her; her hands are quite transparent, and her face is just like the face of an angel. I do not think great or sudden joy ever kills, but you will have to wait, I am sure, sir, until the doctor has given permission."

"At least!" cried Sir Lionel, impatiently, "I may see my child!"

"Yes, I am sure of that; there can be no doubt about that. It will be new life to the little master to see you."

"Who is with the child, Bennett?" asked Sir Lionel.

"Those sisters takes their turns, sir. I went in this morning to see what was wanted from St. Louis, and the young master looked at me and cried out: 'Bennett, bring papa home for me!' I don't think, Sir Lionel, that I have entered that child's room that he has not sent for his papa. He seemed to think if every one else failed to bring you I ought not. Many a time, sir, I would have laid down my life for the power to have taken you to him. This morning it was the one called Sister Marie that was with him, and I think she is with him now."

"She would not mind my going in, Bennett? It could not matter to her," said Sir Lionel, eagerly.

"No, she would not mind it; she would be glad. I have seen her at her wits' end at times to know how to pacify him."

But Sir Lionel never thought of the sister; his heart was beating at the thought of seeing his boy.

"I will risk it, and go in to him," said Sir Lionel, suddenly. "I am sure it will not hurt the child, although it might injure my wife. I will go and see him, Bennett, and you will show me the way."

He saw that the old man trembled with apprehension—that he was altogether unnerved.

"Are you afraid?" he asked.

"No, Sir Lionel; but to me it seems as though some one had risen from the dead!"

"It is only three years since I went away," interrupted Sir Lionel.

"Only three," repeated the old man; "but it seems like thirty years to us, Sir Lionel, who have waited for you."

"Did you think I should came back?" asked Sir Lionel of the old servant.

"I did, sir. I said always: 'Trust in Heaven; the master will come home again.'"

"Did—did—my lady—my wife think so?" he asked, quickly.

"She did not, Sir Lionel. I am quite sure that my lady never expected to see you in this world again."

CHAPTER LXX.

THE child was sleeping. It was the sweetest and most quiet sleep that had fallen over him since his illness began. Sister Marie was well pleased over it. There was a healthy color on his face; the pallor that extreme delicacy brings had left him; the dark shadows under the eyes had gone; the white lids, that hid the eyes so like his father's were closed; the dreadful tension and fever seemed somewhat relaxed; the breath came regularly, and the sister, bending her beautiful head over the child, felt satisfied—felt hopeful; he looked more like recovering now than he had done. If this healthy sleep continued—if he woke, and could eat—then his mother might hope to see him well and strong again. He must not be startled—he must sleep as long as he could; and when Sister Marie heard the sound of low, hushed voices in the corridor outside—heard the sound of footsteps—she bent over the little one as though she would shield him from every

sound. Then the voices were hushed, and the footsteps died away.

There are some coincidences in life that are never to be explained. How was it that while Sister Marie tried to keep all sound from the ears of the child, her mind was running on one idea. What should she do if Sir Lionel came to the villa while she was there? what would she do if suddenly they met face to face? If without word of warning he came into a room where she was, would she fall on her face dead?—would she cry out and betray her secret? She dare not think. The prayers and tears of long years had hardly deadened the great love of him in her heart—the penances and acts of mercy with which she had filled her life had not obliterated one memory of him.

Heaven help the woman who surrenders heart and soul to a passion so mighty as love. It was a strange coincidence that she should be thinking of him—that she should be wondering what would happen if he came. It was not impossible—not even improbable. If he received the letter she had sent, about the boy, he would come at once. Then what should she do?

Go, of course, and at once; she must not remain an hour under the roof when he came. But—oh, Heaven—to look once more, on the face she loved—once more, and then——

Then she bent her beautiful head in deep contrition. Had she not foresworn her love? given it up? trampled it under her feet? Let days and nights of hard penance answer for her. Yet now her heart was beating, warming with the thought of him.

She said to herself, "May Heaven forgive me!"

Then she fancied there was a slight sound at the handle of the door.

She recalled her thoughts; she forgot everything but the child. No sound had reached him, there was no stir, even of the pretty eyelashes that lay on the little cheeks. She would not stir lest she might wake him.

At first, even, she did not think much of it, but the sound came again, as though some one had gently turned the handle of the door; then as though some one had quietly entered the room and was standing still. It might be a nurse or a servant; but in that case the person surely would have spoken. Whoever it was that had entered the room stood silent and motionless.

She began to tremble, but she did not know why; her heart beat quickly, she did not know why; great

drops of moisture gathered on her forehead. She felt the color leave her face; she felt that her eyes had suddenly grown dim.

What was it? Who was there?

She could have cried aloud in her agony, but that every nerve seemed paralyzed.

Paralyzed, yet never so keenly awake—never so keenly alive. For a few minutes it seemed to her she heard no sound but the quick, tumultuous beating of her own heart.

Who was it? Who was standing there silent, watchful? If the dreadful throbbing of heart, brain, and pulse would but stop, she might look to see; but she dared no more turn her head than she dare have faced the quick, forked lightning which tears the clouds.

Slowly some one came nearer, so much nearer that he touched her long black dress—so much nearer that she could hear a long drawn sigh and the quivering breath of a man in the deepest pain.

"Do not disturb the boy if he be sleeping," whispered a low voice. "But I should like to see his face."

Ah, Heaven, it was his voice! The very man she had been thinking of, dreaming, yet longing, had arrived—he was here!

The wonder was she did not die, so great, so intense was her emotion. A great cry went from her heart to Heaven not to die now, and to betray her secret and herself, but for strength, for patience, for courage to undo, so far as she could, the wrong she had done.

That prayer helped her. He was there; the man whom she loved with her whole heart, at whose name she trembled, of whom she had made an idol, and worshipped; he was there—the lover whom she had left on the Calais sands when the stars were gleaming in the sky.

He was there—the only man she had ever loved, whose kisses had lain warm on her lips, and yet they were a world apart, a whole wide world.

Gently enough she disengaged herself from the child, so gently and so slowly that she did not disturb him. One little hand grasped her black vail, but she skillfully drew it away. There was no sound in the room as she drew herself from contact with the child; then she drew the black vail over her face and stood back.

Yes, it was he. Oh, Heaven! how her passionate heart, undisciplined still, went out to him! How she longed, with

passionate longing, words could not tell, to touch his hand, to look in his face! But she drew back, with the black vail drooping over her eyes.

He did not even see her. His whole soul was engrossed in the little child.

"Thank you," he whispered. He took her place and knelt by the side of his boy.

She saw the strong frame tremble, she heard the long, deep drawn sigh, she know that he was weeping passionate tears. Ah, Heaven, if she might comfort him!

She did not know how the moments passed—she did not know whether they were minutes or hours that she stood there, trembling so that she hardly stood; her face hidden, her hands clasped, while he knelt sobbing by the child. How long? Only the angels reckon such moments, and count them as ages of pain. Then Sir Lionel rose, and at the same moment the child opened his eyes,

Sister Marie will never forget that moment. The blue eyes, so full of wonder and childish surprise, opened wide, and fixed themselves on his father. Wonder and surprise first struggled with a rapture of joy; the little fellow raised himself, with a cry.

"It's my own papa!" he cried—"my own papa come back again!"

The little arms outstretched to him were clasped round his neck, the little curly head pillowed on his breast.

Ah, what mattered all she had suffered—what matter if she died?

"Papa, papa! kiss me, papa! I am so glad you have come back! Now mamma will be well, and we shall all be happy. You have come to stay, have you not, papa? You will not go away again?"

"No, I will not leave you, Gordon," was the answer; and his voice was so full of bitter pain that she hardly knew it.

Was he cursing her in his heart that she had wiled him from home and children and wife?

If he knew that she was near, would he have a kindly word for her, or would he curse her as the cause of all his evil and all his woe?

She did not move while he held the child in his arms, soothing him with loving words and gentle caresses. Then little Gordon cried out,—

"Sister Marie! Sister Marie! this is papa!'

She stood motionless as a marble statue.

Sir Lionel bowed with grave dignity; he did not remove his eyes from the boy's face. The black-veiled sister was nothing to him but that she had been so kind to his wife and children. How could he possibly tell that the tall, silent figure, with the half-veiled face, was of any interest to him?

"Sister Marie, come here!" cried the boy. "I shall not want any more medicine now; I have my own papa back; I shall get well now, and run about and play at ball."

A sudden fever flush burned in the boy's face, a sudden light flamed in his eyes, the little hands that clasped his father's neck trembled. Sir Lionel felt some little alarm.

"My dearest Gordon," he said, "you must be quiet—quiet, or I shall have done you more harm than good. "Sister," he added, with a bow, "I am afraid; I must not let the little fellow tire himself."

She stepped forward; he did not look at her or think of her, only of his boy, yet he went on speaking to her.

"I have been away from him some time," he said, so little dreaming to whom he was speaking, "and I am afraid of over-exciting him."

She passed him so closely in going to the boy that her black robes touched him. He drew back with a half-murmured apology. She dare not speak; if she had done so, her voice would have betrayed her. She took the child from his father's arm, and laid his head on the pillow.

"Gentle and efficient," said Sir Lionel to himself, thinking of her for the first time, "but decidedly reticent."

She laid her hand on the boy's head with a murmured "Hush!"—a beautiful white hand.

"Sister Marie," repeated the boy, "this is my papa come home at last never to go away again. Do tell him that you are pleased."

Sir Lionel pitied what he thought was the embarrassment of the gentle and retiring sister. He took the child's hand in his.

"Sister will tell me so—some day," he said, "when she knows me better, you forget that she does not know me now."

"I do not think Sister Marie believed that you would come," said the child, eagerly, "now she sees—she sees!" and again the sister's hand lies gently on the pretty curls.

"I knew, papa, Roger and Bennet said you had gone to a long way off—so far that, perhaps, you would never come back."

"I have been to Egypt, Gordon," said Sir Lionel, thankful that he could say so much and in truth.

The child looked at him with wondering eyes.

"That is where the baby Moses was almost drowned," cried the boy, eager to air his little knowledge. "Mamma told us about him. They put him in a cradle on the river, papa, and a great princess found him. I have seen the pictures."

But Sir Lionel holds up his hand.

"Hush. You will tell me all these things when you are better, my boy. What shall we do to quiet him, sister?"

Why did she make him no answer? Why did she so persistently turn her face from him? Sir Lionel's feeling was one almost of amusement that any one should be so shy. He, however, respected her wish. He knew that those good sisters were always reserved and most careful in their demeanor. This one had been so good to his boy; he must respect her slightest wish. If she did not desire to talk or to be seen, he would neither speak to or look at her. But after a few moments again he forgot her, for the excitement of seeing his father was too much for the child, who grew white and faint, though still with a smile on his face.

"Sister," the boy cried, "it is growing dark. Where are you?"

She raised him in her arms, knowing what was wrong, and that the excitement had been too much for him. She pointed to a bottle that stood upon the table, and Sir Lionel understood her at once.

"You want some cordial?" he said, as he poured it out and gave it to her. The child drank it, and feeling better, laughingly flung back the veil that hung over her face.

If she had not uttered that little cry of dismay, even then Sir Lionel would not have noticed it; but when he heard that sound, he turned to her instinctively; looked at her. Her beautiful face was then in that minute as the face of a dead woman—white, set.

The moment she had dreaded had come. Slowly as clouds take shapes—slowly as a long forgotten face dawns upon us—slowly as life changes into death, the knowledge of her came back to him. It was Vivian's face, half shrouded with the black veil—Vivian's eyes that were held by his! And so for some minutes, in silence that was almost a paralysis, they stood looking at each other. It was as though they had risen from the dead. Neither spoke; neither stirred; neither moved;

neither realized time or place. It was the intensity of a tragedy concentrated in a few minutes.

Then, from the white lips of Sir Lionel, slowly came the words.

"Great Heaven! Vivian—is it you?"

She would have answered him if she could, but all power of speech had gone from her.

Pointing to the child she turned slowly away and quitted the room, leaving him half paralyzed with fear, with wonder, and no gleam of delight.

Could he dream in his wildest dreams that he would have returned to find Vivian by his child's bedside?

CHAPTER LXXI.

At that moment one of the servants, whose duty it was to relieve Sister Marie at stated times, came into the room. She looked perfectly frightened when in place of the gentle, beautiful sister, she found a tall, stalwart, bronzed man.

"My papa! my papa!" shouted the child in glee.

Sir Lionel would have smiled, but those white lips of his were so stiff he could not part them. After a time he spoke, but the very sound of his own voice frightened him.

"I am Sir Lionel Rydal," he said.

"My papa!" interposed little Gordon, "my own papa!"

"You are one of the nurses?" speaking rapidly in French.

"Yes,"—with a deep courtesy—"I am one of the nurses."

"What is the name of the sister who has been nursing here?" he asked.

"Sister Marie," was the reply.

Then he remembered it was not possible that she could have any other name.

"I am afraid," he said "that my sudden return has rather over-excited the child. He must be kept quiet for some time. Take your seat here by his side, and remain with him for a time. Gordon, my little son, you are not to speak; you are to lie quite still until I come back to you."

"Kiss me, papa, and I will not speak one word," said the child, and again the warm clasp of the little arms—the warm, loving kisses from the little lips—brought tears to the father's eyes.

"I shall come back soon, when you wake up again," he said.

And the little fellow, thinking the sooner he slept the sooner he should wake to see that idolized father again, closed his eyes resolutely and slept again. He longed to repeat to the nurse his favorite words, "Papa has come," but he would not, because he had promised.

With a lingering look at the beautiful, delicate face, Sir Lionel left the room.

He must see Vivian—he must find her—he must speak to her; for very wonder and emotion he felt ready to die. He did not even know where he was; the house and everything in it was strange to him; it was home, yet not home; he stood for a few minutes bewildered. His wife was very ill, and it would never do for her to hear suddenly the news of his return. Where should he go?—what should he do?—where find Vivian?

He was standing in the broad sunlit corridor, where sweet flowers bloomed, and from the large windows he could see the mountains. Where was she? Vivian here, with his wife and children! Whose hand had led to it? Was it Providence or fate? Then he remembered the dress she wore—Vivian, the beautiful, bright Countess of Lynn, the most dainty and luxury-loving of women, in that coarse garb! he must have dreamed it, it could not be real. It must have been some strange likeness, yet in her eyes, like living eyes in a dead face, he had seen that she knew him. Heaven help him in his perplexity. He did not like to call the servants to ask for her; he did not know what she would wish him to do.

She was evidently quite unknown. He must hear what she had to say—her explanation, before he could do anything at all.

"Vivian here!"

He said the words out loud to see if the sound would help him at all. He had thought of her, wondered about her, longed to know where she was, and she was with his wife and children. He had returned to his wife, contrite and repentant, and Vivian met him on the threshold of his home! Was it fate or Providence? Never since the first days of the folly which had grown into guilt, had Sir Lionel felt as he felt now; never had his sin looked him so full, so boldly, in the face—that, too at that very moment when he thought he was to atone for it.

Where should he find her? He saw a door at the end of the corridor; he opened it. There were white marble steps leading to a tangle of beautiful flowers, a pretty shaded nook where the boughs of the trees interlaced, and the flowers grew as they would.

She was there. He could see the black dress among the scarlet blooms. In one moment he was by her side.

She was kneeling on the ground, her head resting against the flower-covered pedestal, on which a famous statue had once stood, weeping as though her heart would break, and the sound of those passionate sobs brought back so forcibly the scene at Calais, that he stood for half a second overpowered.

Then he was by her side, but he did not touch her; he was almost afraid to speak. At the sound of his hurried footsteps she raised her head, and he saw that her beautiful face was drowned in tears.

"Vivian!" he cried. But she held up her hand.

How well he remembered that queenly gesture—how often had that white hand waved him to her and sent him away!

"Hush!" she said. "Do not speak to me—do not know me. I never meant you to find me here. I am going away."

"Vivian, let me speak to you!" he cried. "I must. If you go away and leave me in this perplexity, I could not live. Speak to me—let me speak to you! I feel like a man on the verge of madness. I cannot realize that it is you. It seems to me that you will vanish from my eyes—that I am haunted by a presence not real. Oh, Vivian, speak to me!"

"What shall I say?" she asked, in a low voice—"what words are meet to pass between you and me! I am sorry that I have seen you. Let me pass out of your presence, out of your life, and forget me."

It was not the glamour of love falling over him again, but he seemed to realize in one minute the greatness of her love for him; for the first time he saw it in all its intensity, and he bowed his head before the loyalty of a passion greater even than he could understand.

What had not this beautiful woman done for him? For him she had left husband, home, and friends—for him she had given up her high position, her sovereignty among men—for him she had now given up her life! How she had loved him! And now—her beautiful head bowed in shame, her beautiful face white with pain—she was asking him that she might pass out of his life forever.

He had wondered whether in years to come he should ever see her again; and now they stood together face to face in his own home.

He had returned to his fair and gentle Elinore—he found Vivian on the threshold of his home!

"I must speak to you!" he cried, vehemently. "You

need not fear ; you are sacred to me as an angel from heaven —sacred as I was once in your eyes for my children's sake. I must speak to you, Vivian. There has been too much between us for us to meet and part in this fashion. Will you tell me what brings you here—a ministering angel of mercy—to my wife and children ? It seems to me," he continued, touching the wooden crucifix that she wore—" it seems to me, Vivian, you have risen out of yourself, that a woman left me, and I have found an angel in her place. Tell me how you came here. Have you never been back home—to the world—to your friends ? Tell me ; I am impatient to know."

She raised her lovely eyes to his, and he said to himself, as his gaze fell upon them, there was more of heaven than of earth in their light.

" I will tell you," she said, slowly ; " you have a right to know. We shall never meet again ; I will tell you all. No, I never returned ; I could not ; the springs of my life seemed to be broken ; it would have been a thousand times easier for me to lie down and die. Lionel," she said, and the sweet liquid sound never fell so sweetly from her lips, " you only knew the wicked part of me. I think my young mother and my soldier father—the hero who died on the hills of Galenza —must be always praying for me. There was a good side to my character that my mad love hid from you. Although I committed the sin that is in this world beyond pardon, I never lost my sense of Heaven. I was mad when I tempted you ; I was mad when I left husband and home, but when I came to my senses and realized what I had done, I repented—not weakly, but with my whole heart and soul—and said to myself that I would try and atone for my sin.

" Atone for it by prayer and by penance, by sighs and by tears, and by giving the rest of my life to deeds of mercy. Atone for it by giving up all that makes life bright and beautiful. For me who loved so madly, no more love ; for me who had loved luxury and splendor, nothing but poverty ; for me who had loved the praise and homage of men, a hidden life with the poor and the sorrowful. Do you understand, Lionel ? "

" Yes," he replied, bowing his head, " I understand."

" In and through all my life," she continued, " in its wildest, maddest moments, I have never lost sight of the hope that I should go to Heaven ; never but once, and that was when, at the height of my madness, I forgot what

was good and true, and thought I should find Heaven with you."

She stopped, with a passionate sob that seemed to die on her lips, and he saw her raise the little crucifix to her lips.

"That was the only time," she said, "that I forgot God, Heaven, honor, truth, and my own soul; but when I woke from my mad, beautiful dream, it came back to me again, it filled my heart with sorrow, and it made me resolve most firmly that I would do my best to atone for my sin. I heard of the sisters, the good women who give their lives to God and to the doing of good deeds, and I joined them. That is my story—nothing more."

"But how did you come here—to my wife and children?" he asked, his heart aching so intensely for her that every beat of it was pain.

"I joined the house at Paris," she replied, "and on entering it begged one favor, it was that I might never be sent to English people. I wanted to die to my old self, to let Vivian, the unhappy Countess of Lynn, be dead to everything and every one; from her ashes to raise a repentant woman who should spend the rest of her life in working for the heaven she had so nearly lost. The superiors of the house were very good to me; they never asked me to see an English person; but the superioress of St. Louis here sent to Paris for a sister who could speak English; they asked me and I came, never thinking that here, under the shadow of the Apennines, I should find any one likely to know me, or in whom I was even interested.

"Lionel, there are moments in life during which we seem to live years; such a moment came to me when I found that I had been sent for to nurse your wife and children."

"Was it fate or Providence?" he said, slowly.

"It was the will of Heaven; in no other way should I have seen the enormity of my sin, in no other way should I so thoroughly have repented of it,"

CHAPTER LXXII.

"I THINK," continued Sister Marie, with a light on her face that he remembered for a long time afterwards—"I think, Lionel, that God saw I never intended or meant to be wicked, and He saved me after His own most merciful way. God know

everything; men so little. He knows what a loving, passionate heart I had: how I longed for love as the only good thing in life; how, strange to say, I never found it. I had neither father, mother, sister, nor brother—the most loving heart, perhaps, in the whole wide world, and yet no one to love. God knew all that, but man did not; and my hope is that He will remember all when He judges me. This one fact, which seems so strange that I should come here to care for your wife and children, almost seems to me like a promise from Heaven that I am forgiven. We shall part now, Lionel," she said, "and we shall not meet again until that day when the sea gives up its dead. Dear, as we part now, we shall not be afraid to meet then!"

Once more she raised the little crucifix to her lips, and the face on which the sunlight fell was as the face of an angel to him.

"Stay," she said. "I must finish my good work. You will never betray my secret, I know; it is safe with you. I will stay to finish that which I have begun. If I leave just at this crisis it will be cowardly. You see that Vivian, Countess of Lynn, is dead—dead with her vain beauty, her mad love, her blighted life—dead, and forgotten; but Sister Marie lives, and must finish her work. Do you know," she asked suddenly, "Why I asked for that name of Marie?"

"No; tell me," said Sir Lionel.

"The first day I was at the convent I saw a picture which I shall never forget. In the background rose great hills covered with palm-trees; a church with a large cross on the tower stood under the palm-trees, whose graceful branches formed an arch over it; and at the door of the church stood a woman—a young and beautiful woman. She seemed trying to force open the church, which would not yield to her. There was frantic terror on her beautiful face—wild fear and surprise. I had never seen such a look on any human face before. I stopped before the picture, and asked the superioress what it was.

"'Do you not know?" she said, with some surprise; 'that is St. Mary of Egypt,' and she told me the legend of St. Mary of Egypt."

She was speaking eagerly now; the lovely face lit up with enthusiasm, her eyes shining with a bright, clear flame. It wakes none of the old passions in him; to him she was henceforth more angel than woman.

'St. Mary, of Egypt, was a most beautiful woman, who lived many hundreds of years ago, when the world was still young,

and things were not as they are now. She was the loveliest woman of her time, and the most wicked.

"In the midst of her luxury and wickedness she heard of the new light shining over the darkened land—Christianity—and she longed to know something of it. Passing by a Christian church one day, she tried to enter it, but the door which opened so readily to others was closed to her. She tried in vain to enter the church; no force of hers could open the door; some supernatural strength was exerted against her, and she knew that it was because she was so vile and wicked a sinner, she was not worthy to enter the temple of the living God. Mary of Egypt fell on her face, bemoaning her sins; from that time she led a life of penance and prayer, hating sin, loving, and truly serving God; she lived a holy life, and died a holy death.

"I looked long at that picture; to my fancy the doors of Heaven had been closed in my face. I turned to the superioress. 'May I take that name,' I asked, and I received permission. Therefore among the others I am known as Sister Mary of Egypt; but oh, Heaven be praised! I begin to hope the door of Heaven will be opened for me at last. I have grievously sinned, but I have grievously suffered. From now think of Vivian, Countess of Lynn, as dead, but do not forget Sister Marie. Let the memory of me go through life with you, to keep you from sin. You may always think of me as praying for you and those dear to you. Oh, Lionel, you have tears in your eyes!"

"They are for the Countess of Lynn," he replied, "and not for the woman who will live in my heart and memory as Sister Mary of Egypt."

"We will speak no more of it," said Sister Marie. "Before I go I must finish my work—I must prepare your wife to see you."

"Will you do that?" he asked. "Oh, Vivian, it is too much—I cannot hope for it, I must not hope."

"You forget," she said, with gentle dignity, "that Vivian is dead, with all her faults, her love, her passion—dead. Let this be the last time her name sounds like a death-knell on the clear summer air—for the future I am Sister Marie to you."

Involuntarily he stretches out his hand, with a yearning cry.

"You will do this, Sister Marie?" he said: and at the sound of the name from his lips it seemed to her that her sacrifice was complete.

"Lady Rydal has been, and is now very ill," she said. "A

sudden surprise, such as seeing you, would kill her, I believe. She is an angel, Sir Lionel—the purest, sweetest, and most noble of women; a man may rest his whole heart on her, and know no fear; and she loves you, how you will never know. But, Sir Lionel, she has told me all her story—during the long hours of her illness we talked it all over. She never had the slightest idea who I was; she, so gentle, so pitiful to others, so loving to every one, loathed with fiercest contempt the companion of your flight; she loves me as she knows me now. You will never betray me—never let her know; let her keep her innocent love in her heart for me."

"You will let me thank you, Sister Marie," he said, "for all that you have done for me in tending so skilfully my wife and my children."

"I want no thanks," she said, gently. "It has done my heart good. You must help me, Sir Lionel, to carry out the last little deception I shall ever have to practise in this world. I must go and it must be understood that I have been suddenly sent for to the convent, and that another sister is appointed to take my place. Will you do this for me?"

"I will," he replied; but there were tears in his eyes, and tears in his voice.

"Are you going to Paris?" he asked, suddenly.

"I am going to put the width of the world between myself and every one whom I know," she answered. "Our superiors want some sisters to go to China, where there is the greatest need of religion. I have volunteered to go there."

"To China?" he repeated. "Then you will never return to the world where you once reigned a queen?"

"Never!" she replied. "There is a great deal of work there, and very few to do it. I will be one of them."

"And I, who have brought all this misery and all this woe upon you," he said, "I shall never see you again?"

"Not in this world," she replied; "but we shall not be afraid to meet before God. I shall think of you in far-off England; my heart will grow light and glad when I think of your gentle wife and little children, all happy again with you, the shadow gone from your lives. It will be so, will it not? Tell me, to comfort me. See how weak and human I am that I cling to human comfort. It will be so, will it not?"

"With the blessing of Heaven!" he answered.

"I must go. Good-by! I am going to Lady Rydal now. When she is ready to see you, and I think there is no danger, I will send for you. You will come then?"

"I will come," he answered.

"Good-by," said Sister Marie. "We part in this world that we may meet in heaven. I look my last upon your face that I may see it shining one day among the angels in heaven. I listen to your voice now for the last time, that I may hear it in the land where there is no parting, no sorrow. I change human for heavenly love, earth for heaven. Oh, dear one, whom I have loved so well, good-by!"

Once more her eyes looked into his, while her lips framed the words.

"Good-by," he repeated, "good-by."

He would have taken her hand to kiss it, but when he bent his head his eyes were blinded with tears.

She raised the little crucifix to his lips, and so left him. They never met again.

He watched the black-robed figure as it vanished among the trees, and he fell on his face, with the bitterest pain a man could feel gnawing at his heart.

Sister Marie went at once to Lady Rydal's room. She found her anxiously waiting for her. She was better this morning, and the sweet, fair beauty of her face was beyond words. She kissed Sister Marie lovingly.

"I feel a touch of rose leaves here and here," she said, laying her hand on either side of her face. "A touch of a beautiful, fragrant, fresh rose," she repeated.

"You look as though the roses were coming," said Sister Marie.

She would say nothing until Lady Rydal was up and dressed, then she would tell her. Half an hour later found the invalid on the couch in the pretty sitting-room she used, looking most spiritual and beautiful. She wondered why Sister Marie would let no other hands touch her, why she would brush out the long, golden, waving hair, why she would put white roses in it.

"All for the doctor, Sister Marie?" she said. "He will not see them."

She wondered why Sister Marie found that pretty morning dress, all white silk and soft white cashmere, why she would place white roses on her breast. She laughed with the simple glee of a child.

"You are trying to make me beautiful, Sister Marie," she said. "It is a long time since I have looked beautiful."

"You are always beautiful, dear," said Sister Marie, and Lady Rydal smiled again.

"I believe," she said, "that I am pleased to be praised."

"That is right," said Sister Marie. "I want to make you look like a picture this morning. I shall place this crimson cushion under your golden head. Your face looks like a pale rose lying on it. And over this pretty white dress we must throw a crimson shawl. There! that is a picture. Now I shall put your favorite vase near you, and fill it with crimson flowers. That is a picture, Lady Rydal!—I wish you could see yourself. Ah, there is a sunbeam over your head: I must lower the blind, and let it fall over your dress."

Again Lady Rydal laughed.

"I am quite proud," she said. "Ah, me! it is a long time since I felt proud—a long, long time. I shall give your picture a name, Sister Marie; it shall be called 'A Fanciful Invalid."

Sister Marie shook her head.

"No, we must give it a better name than that," she said; "let us find one."

She went to Lady Rydal, and knelt down by her side; for the last time the loving arms clasped the frail figure, for the last time the beautiful, passionate face bent over the fair, spiritual one—for the last time the two women so strangely placed, so near yet so far apart, looked into each other's eyes.

For the last time! It seemed as though heart met heart, and soul met soul.

CHAPTER LXXIII.

THE silence that had lasted for some minutes was broken by a cry from Lady Rydal. She was looking anxiously in the beautiful face bent over her.

"What is it, Sister Marie?" she asked, "You have such a strange look, and you are trembling. Why you tremble, dear, like a leaf in the sweet summer wind. You look as though you had been dead and come to life again."

"That would be strange," began Sister Marie.

Lady Rydal interrupted her.

"What is that in your voice—something quite new and strange. Is it sorrow, is it joy? I hear, but I do not understand. What is it, Sister Marie?"

"Neither for myself—both for you."

Lady Rydal raised herself quickly, with a sudden sense of alarm.

"Is Gordon worse?" she cried.

"No, he is better. Little Gordon will live now. I have had beautiful visions of him this morning. He will live, and go back to his English home. I can fancy him running about the fields and the garden in far-off beautiful England. I can imagine what a grand, strong, good man he will make—the little Gordon! But he will never forget this long terrible illness, and I am sure he will never forget me."

"How could any of us?" said Lady Rydal. "You have become part of our lives. I shall always be glad and thankful that I knew you."

But Sister Marie was strangely silent.

Lady Rydal went on, with a bright smile.

"I am amused," she said, "when I think of the days when you first came, my father and I—do not laugh, sister,—we thought you the most beautiful woman we had ever seen, and the squire would say to me twenty times in a day, "What a face she has, Elinore! that woman ought to be a queen."

"I have been a queen of sorrow," said Sister Marie, gently.

"I have grown wiser since those days," said Lady Rydal. "Now I see the value of good nursing in illness, and I think one of the noblest ways in which a woman can spend her life is to do with it what you have done with yours. I thought your beauty and grace wasted; I do not think so now."

She was strangely silent—she who generally had bright words and kind smiles.

"You do love me, then?" she said. "Tell me in plain words, that I may remember them when you are all well and I am far away. Tell me that I have been of use to you," she continued, with gracious humility, "that I have helped you and soothed many hours of pain for you."

There was a wistful look in her eyes, a pleading tone in her voice, that struck Lady Rydal.

"I could not tell you," she answered, slowly. "I could not tell you how much I love you. I have never," added Lady Rydal, solemnly "I have never loved any woman in the world as I love you."

"Is that true?" asked Sister Marie.

"Perfectly true. I never knew my own mother. I love Mrs. Gordon, my father's wife. I have some friends in England—women whom I like—but I have never loved any one half so much as I love you."

"I am so glad," said the sister, gently. For one minute

she laid her beautiful face on the fair, pale one ; she kissed it tenderly—" I am so glad," she said, " so glad that you love me."

" Of course I love you," said Lady Rydal, " and I am grateful to you ; I shall thank you all my life. But for you, I am sure that little Gordon would not have lived ; but for you, I am quite sure that I should have died."

" I wonder," said Sister Marie—" you see that I am given to wondering—I wonder if, in the years to come, you were to hear anything about me—any curious thing—of any wrong that I had done, if it would make any difference ; if you would care less for me, or be sorry that you had loved me."

" No," said Lady Rydal, " nothing would make any difference to me."

" I am glad of it," said the sister, gently. " You will see I am weak and fanciful this morning," she said, " but I want you to kiss my face and say ' I love you.' "

Lady Rydal smiled, but she drew the beautiful face down to hers.

" I love you," she said, simply.

And Sister Marie was quite silent for some time ; then, with a voice quite changed in tone, she said,—

" Can you guess why I have made you look like a picture, Lady Rydal ? "

" To please the doctor or the squire," she answered. " I am sure that papa will be delighted."

" He is not here to-day ; he may come later on, but he is not here yet. It is to please some one."

It was the voice more than the words which startled Lady Rydal.

" I wonder," said Sister Marie, " how strong you are—if you could bear something that would be a great pleasure, a terrible pain. I wonder what answer you would make, if I asked you, ' What is your heart's desire ? "

" One that can never be gratified," she answered, promptly; ' my heart's desire is to see my husband again."

" And what if it were granted ? "

A sudden faint cry—the fair, sweet face grew ghastly, as with the pallor of death—a terrible shudder passed over the fragile figure—and for one-half minute Sister Marie feared the words had killed her.

Then Lady Rydal seized her hands.

" You must tell me," she gasped. " I am dying to learn ! Tell me quickly—you have heard of him ? "

"I will tell you all about him if you will try to be calm. I have something to tell you that will please you, but I dare not speak of it unless you are quite calm and still. Stop trembling; be perfectly quiet, and I will give you news of your husband."

"I cannot," she said, with a pasionate burst of tears—"I cannot. Oh, speak to me! Tell me—tell me!"

"You can bear pain and sorrow—you have had more than your share—now I want to show that you can bear joy and happiness as well. We have news of your husband! Nay, you must not disturb my picture—those white roses must be still in your hair, and these on your breast. Now you lie quiet again. I will tell you more. Your husband is living and well—quite well. He has heard of Gordon's illness, and he is coming home to see him."

"Coming here?" gasped a faint voice. "Here!—to this very place, sister?"

"Yes, here. He is coming with his heart full of love for you, of sorrow for his folly; and you will find, when he tells you his story, that he was, perhaps, not so much to blame—that his sin is not half so great as you have thought it." And Lady Rydal never stopped to think, either then or afterward, how it was that Sister Marie knew so much. She clung to her, crying out that she could not bear it—the news was killing her.

A terrible paroxysm of tears—tears that saved her life—and then Lady Rydal grew calm with the quiet of exhaustion.

"If he has heard those cries," thought Sister Marie, "how distressed he will be."

The beautiful eyes were looking at her, filled with the question that the trembling lips could hardly ask.

"Tell me?" she whispered. "There is more—tell me?"

"Yes, there is more. He is coming to-day; he longs to see you; but it all depends on you. If you are good and quiet, they will let you see him; if not you must wait, and he will be sorely disappointed."

Certainly the news nearly killed Lady Rydal. Sister Marie went in search of some restorative, and when she had forced her to drink it, a faint color came back to her fair, pale face.

"Now I can talk to you," said Sister Marie. "It is good news, is it not, to think that you may see him to-day?"

"To-day," repeated Lady Rydal, and her eyes sought the shining skies. "To-day! Oh, sister, can it be true?"

"It is quite true, dear. Now you are sensible—you have

ceased to tremble; you look quiet and calm—my picture is all right."

"I am better," said Lady Rydal. "I have such a strange feeling, as though I were standing outside the gates of heaven, and they were going to open for me."

Ah, me! how pale Sister Marie's face was growing; the moments were passing so quickly, the crisis of her life was drawing so near.

"I have something else to tell you, dear," said Sister Marie —"something else, and that will crown the rest. I was told to prepare you, and I have tried to tell you by degrees."

A great calm came over Lady Rydal; she lay perfectly still, a light in her eyes that had not shone there for years.

A great solemn calm; the sunlight seemed to be light from heaven as it fell on the fair face and the white roses. She looked up with a quick, startled glance.

"Sister," she said, "I know he is here."

"Yes, he is here, waiting, longing to see you. He will come when I send word that you are ready. Lady Rydal you will forgive him. Heaven opens its arms to all repentant sinners. You must not be less merciful; you will receive him kindly, and, ah! my dear, my dear," she added, wringing her hands with a faint gesture full of woe, "be good to him; he has suffered—he must have suffered. Do not take any revenge, be kind to him. You will have a long and—oh, please Heaven! —a happy life before you. Promise me that all this miserable past shall be forgotten, that you will love him better than you have ever done. Oh, promise me this!"

It was strange that this deep interest in her—this deep, tearful interest in her husband—did not strike Lady Rydal.

"You will not reproach him: you will be kind to him, good to him, love him, and make him happy? Promise me."

"I promise," replied Lady Rydal; and with a swift, sudden movement Sister Marie laid her lips on hers.

Perhaps she knew who would touch those sweet lips next, and so she placed her eternal farewell there.

Then life was all over with her; she rose from her knees—she touched the bell.

"Will you tell Sir Lionel that Lady Rydal is ready for him?" she said gently to the servant who answered it.

It was the supreme moment of her existence; the pain of a lifetime was crowded into it, but she made no sign.

The servant closed the door. She went back to Lady Rydal.

"I will leave you," she said. "It will be best for you to see him alone."

And without another word, in silence more bitter than death, she passed from the room—passed from Lady Rydal's life having looked for the last time on the fair face that was to be shadowed by her no more.

As she passed the corridor Sir Lionel entered the room What passed there was known only to the angels. No one word of that interview reached the ears of men; but at evening, when the purple and golden lights shone in the sky, and the birds were singing their vesper hymns, there were peace and content on Lady Rydal's face, so that when the squire saw her, and saw shining in her eyes the light that had filled them years ago, his anger died.

And the sun set on a happy home. Only one there knew that side by side with this sunshine of happiness lay the deep shadow of tragedy.

CHAPTER LXXIV.

Some years after these events had happened, a grand story was told in England. In that far-off land of China a barbarous custom held good. Male children were welcomed into the world, but a baby girl was only considered of little worth; the parents hastened, as a rule, to get rid of it. The common practice was for the baby girls to be taken out to the river and left there. It was no uncommon sight to see on the breast of the deep, swift river the fair body of a tiny child.

When this barbarous and cruel custom became known in England, good and charitable people rushed to the rescue. Bands of holy and devoted women went off to China, by the aid of funds collected in England.

They founded homes or missions there on the great rivers; they watched the waters, and as soon as a little child was seen there, they rescued it eagerly. Sometimes the chiidren so found were dead, then they buried them; more often they were living, and they rescued them. They took them home to the mission houses, where the children were first baptized, carefully tended, well fed, well clothed, well trained. No greater or more noble work could exist than this.

But at times, and in the most wild and barbarous parts, it often happened that the brutal and ignorant natives would rise and massacre the good sisters and their helpers. Such a story came to England now in the annals of the missions, and soon spread over the land.

It was of a mission called Choo-Sing, a settlement on the river Sing, and a part of the country where the cruel custom was most in force. Here a community of sisters had established themselves under the guidance of an accomplished and beautiful woman, known only as Sister Marie. Of her family, birth, position, or society, of her early life, nothing was known.

Of this Sister Marie the English papers spoke when they gave an account of the mission—of her hard work, of her self-sacrifice, of the numbers of children she had saved from the waters, of her zeal in getting money to keep them, of her ever-tiring zeal in training them. She was worshipped in that wild, rough country; the people looked upon her as an angel of light. She helped them in poverty, she nursed them in sickness, and she helped them to bury their dead.

To the children she was a very angel of consolation; the little faces brightened for her as for no other. As time passed on, the numbers of her subjects grew larger. People went from all parts of the world to join her, and the mission of Choo-Sing was universally known. Sister Marie had done many good deeds there. She collected money in generous England for building a church-school, a grand hospital for women—in fact, she had christianized that part of the country.

And, as a matter of course, the large, new, populous missions met with much opposition from the "heathen Chinee." At times the Chinese rose *en masse*, imprisoned, tortured, and slew the community; but it was long since anything of that kind had happened at Choo Sing, and the band of sisters there marched on with undaunted courage and no fear, till at length the terrible story came home to England, and drew tears from many eyes. For some short time there had been great feeling about the preservation of these baby girls. The most ignorant part of the people rose in rebellion against it, they said the land would be overrun, and among a few of the most brutal, there was a conspiracy against the sisters; they were to be solemnly warned, and then if they did not cease to rescue children from the river they were to be put to death.

Sister Marie smiled when the notice was taken to her.

"We must die," she said, "if need must be; but living, we cannot forsake the little ones."

And they did not.

There came a bright moonlight night when news was suddenly brought to the sisters that three little baby girls had just been placed where the tide must wash them away in a short time unless they were rescued.

No time was lost. Sister Marie, who always headed these expeditions of danger herself, went and took with her two sisters.

The moon shone bright as day; they saw the river, the bamboo canes growing down to its edge. They saw the little babes, whose faint cries drew them to the spot, but they did not see the little body of armed, desperate men, bent on putting an end to this rescue of children.

They raised the thin, little wailing infants, wrapped them in shawls, and had begun to retrace their steps, when the armed men stepped from their ambush. It was a sharp, short struggle; the two weaker woman were soon overpowered, the wailing infants snatched from their arms and flung back into the river; but Sister Marie struggled bravely for the little one in her arms.

"Give back the child to the river," cried her assailants, "and we will not hurt you. You speak our language, you live among our people, but you break our laws. Our people know best; the land will be overrun, and we shall have famine if these women-children live. Give them back to the river and we will not hurt you, for you are good to us and ours."

But she was too brave to give up the little weeping babe to the river, or the cruel men who would have slain it. She was too courageous to fear; she spoke a few words to the frightened women, telling them to run to the mission in search of aid.

When they returned with help sufficient to have baffled their assailants, the men had fled, and Sister Marie, with the dead child in her arms, lay on the banks of the river, pierced through the heart by the blow of a sharp dagger—dead, with a smile sweeter than any she had ever worn in life on her lips.

Great wounds on her hands and arms showed how bravely she had struggled for the little child; but under heaven no sight was ever seen so piteous as that sweet smile on the dead white face.

They buried her in the little cemetery of the mission. Nothing on the plain wooden cross tells of her birth or rank; there is no name but that of Sister Marie.

To this day they speak of her as a saint. Since she lived and died, thanks to the English mission, this cruel system has

almost died out; but they tell of the sister, with the beautiful face, who did so much good among them; how she gave her life in defence of a little helpless baby, wailing in her arms. And the children will say that now, when the moon shines brightly, they see a white figure, with a beautiful face, standing on the banks of the river with a child in her arms.

Which of you, who have read her story, will judge her? and which would throw a stone at her grave, where, in her beauty, she sleeps until the Judgment?

People read this story of the beautiful Englishwoman who had sacrificed her life for a little child, and never dreamed that the heroine had once been the most beautiful and brilliant queen of fashion.

One knew it. Sir Lionel Rydal, with his wife and children, was at home at Dunwold when the story appeared. Lady Rydal, entering her husband's studio one morning, found him with his head bent over the paper, his face hidden in his hands, and tears falling like rain.

Then he told her all; he could keep the secret no longer. She was dead to whom he had pledged his faith never to mention it, and the telling of it could but honor her now.

Lady Rydal listened as one listens to far-off music in a dream. She said no words; she had none at command; but when the story ended, she looked in her husband's face and said,—

"Lionel, think what she suffered."

Every word she had uttered came back to her; all that had seemed strange in Sister Marie was explained now. For many days afterward there was a strange, half-dazed expression on her face, and before her mind there remained ever two pictures—the first was of the guilty woman with the bleeding brow and bruised breast, slain by the hands of jeering men, the woman whom she had likened to Vivian, Countess of Lynn. The other was of a beautiful woman standing on the banks of a river giving her life to save that of a helpless babe she held in her arms, and lying there dead, a dagger wound in her heart, with a smile sweeter than any she had ever worn in life on her face.

When Sir Lionel is most happy, when his wife and children surround him—when his grand old home is fairest and life crowns him with its richest blessings—Sir Lionel never forgets Vivian. He sees the beautiful, sorrowful face in the passing clouds, in the river depths, shining on him from the green foliage; and he would have thought of her even more if he had

known that when they came to bury her, underneath the black habit and the wooden crucifix they found a small locket that held the dried leaves of a withered flower, the first he had given her, with this one word written,—

"LIONEL."

It is buried with her. The world judged her, and said her sin was "BEYOND PARDON," but the judgments of Heaven are often adverse to those of men.

THE END.

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